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COMMONTHOUGHT

2019



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2019

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Callie Gonsalves

Meg McDonald

Cerulean

Blue breaks, as though from winter's stormy egg.
My soul has known no hue so rich as this.
I burn to see such searing azure skies,
Immense as thought and old as formless time.

The high and careless gusts cast out the clouds
To weary wastes beyond the realm of light.
The far horizon rim is fogged by mist
That veils the fickle stars from us below.

Is this the sky that hung bone-bleak and wan,
With death's pale cheer and ghostly half-seen light,
The harsh impassive dome that choked the sun,
As empty as the stark unwritten page?

Anonymous

Amor Fati for Two

My love for you
was born on the broken backs
of burning stars
and so
my love for you will live forever,
lonely in the smolders of new worlds.

I held it close for as long as I could,
as long as love could ever be carried
by something so fragile
and fleeting
as me.

Love is the stuff of
distant suns and dark space and
what are we,
to the eons of earth?
What are we,
to the stars past ours?

Molecules scrambling,
rearranging, aging
soil to soul
and back again
a gasp of hydrogen
a shiver of heat,
Conception
crescendo
collapse.

Anonymous

Just Outside Paradise

I will be eternally grateful
for all the golden hours Somerville has shown me,
as the sun stoops to kiss the city goodnight,
lingers
long enough to beg a blush from our cheeks
before he gives in
to gravity's insistence
and stumbles out of sight and
everyone else leaves with the light
but you and me and her.
You and me
and our sunburned shoulders
wine stained teeth and belly laughter
and she
stripped of her crown and kneeling now
bowed neck and naked before lit windows
and nearly silently humming streets.

We wait a while without saying much,
watching the stars settle so many lifetimes away
until in the darkness she reveals herself for
us alone
her hidden honeysuckle groves
and wild ivy sidling
up
chapped red bricks,
her secret gardens blooming all around
us in
the afterglow of golden hour.

Anne Elezabeth Pluto

Memories

Today I drove out
Through the pine highway
That ultimately leads to the sea
It was this kind of weather—bright
With cloud cover that did hover in the silver
Light of the train that came from
The heart of the awakening city.

It was not a journey worth remembering
Retracing my path backwards driving
Towards the scene—I haven't played
It forward—just shuffled it among
Lost items—dead leads—forgotten
But for the present—how I came
Here—how the lies were effervescent
And the trip home was clouded
There is always shame in the moments
A sad half smile at someone else's story
When it comes too close to the truth.



Owen Flores

Ghost Choice

1.

SINCE YOU WERE YOUNG, you've believed in ghosts. Like all great paranormal investigators, you've always had trouble proving their existence. One time, when you were six, you stayed up all night watching branches tap your bedroom window trying to tell the difference between the tree and the spectral beings you were sure were there.

Despite the lack of any real supernatural events in your life, and people constantly telling you that ghosts "aren't real," you know they are real. Tonight, you're going to prove that. You've cleared your schedule, prepared your gear. The only question is, where are you going to find this ghost?

- *The Jeffers Mansion, the most haunted building within thirty miles—10*
- *Your dorm basement, which would be the cheapest to get to—3*
- *Deadman's Pier, a small dock with an unfortunately very scary name—19*

Ryan Bottitta

Abyss Bridges the Soul

How deeply do you drown
When you dive deep beneath?
Weights tied to your ankles
Air bubbles when you scream.

I stand tall on land,
Watching this unfold.
Droplets of water
Slither down my skin
A sheet of bitter cold.

Where do you belong
When you run from all you know?
Changing ups the scenery
You push while being pulled. And
You've pushed yourself so far
That you become what you fear most.
Anchored to the sea bottom—
The secrets you never told.

A prophecy from long ago
By a wise one who foretold
The restless nature of the soul
Believed to be folklore
Until the soul was no more.
That's how some stories go
No one listens until it shows
Up to snatch you up,
To take you abrupt
To the haunted, deep unknown.

Where do you belong, you ask?
Now you want to know.
Ears unclogged,
Head's surfaced above
The ocean spit you up.
The shattered fragments
Find their way to its owner,
You, to be pieced together.
Amid all the pieces,
One is still missing.
Hollow in your chest
A being left unrest
So goddamn self-absorbed
You lost the human piece you had left.
Your demon knocks on your door
To knock some sense into your soul
But you have none left
You lost the bet
Where you belong, you belong no more.

Meg McDonald

Floating

The river was wide, quiet. I was swimming
with my friends. My limbs grew heavy.
I had always assumed, all else failing,
that I could float on my back
 (because floating is easy, right?
 it had always been easy before)
And so I tried. It wasn't enough.
The river churned around me, holding me helpless,
afraid to go under, unable to stay afloat
 (far enough from the edge of devastation
 to pretend it would never come)
I wouldn't reach out, someone reached out to me.
My friend, strong, kind, ever there.
His arms kept me afloat
Down the long and rolling river.

Meg Scribner

Postcards

Late Spring

Short sentiments

Written on 60¢ postcards

Like honey and coffee

They're sweet

Some are

But others are bitter

And soaked in tears

From a tiring weekend

Long ago.



Jessica Mahoney

Jessica Mahoney
Flowers and Sticks

THE BEEPING BROKE through the silence, the dreaded beeping. It filled up the room and brought tears to Carmen's eyes. The cold hand she held in her own was weak now, that same hand that used to grip onto her tightly as they crossed the street—the same one that used to shuffle the mahjong tiles in a room full of laughter. Laughter, instead of beeping.

Carmen's grandmother, her porpor, was a gambler. She'd gambled in her youth at casinos, gambled with her family members at this same mahjong table, and now she was gambling again.

It went by quick. The beeping grew quicker and quicker, until suddenly Carmen wasn't holding her porpor's hand anymore. No. Now she was being pushed away, further and further back, until she couldn't see her grandmother at all. Tears flooded her eyes and sobs filled her ears, replacing the insistent beeping. Then there was silence.



"STAND TALL, CARMEN," her mother told her as they stood next to the entrance of the funeral home. Carmen straightened her posture, holding her hands tightly in front of herself. Her mother stood, looking straight ahead, trying not to let grief show. To her mother, saving face was always the most important thing—but Carmen *did* hear her mother cry late at night.

The smell of incense filled Carmen's nose, and it was a smell that always made her sick. Others always described it as calming, but she had different feelings toward it. To Carmen, the sickly-sweet smell meant death. So she held her hands a little tighter as a tear swept her face. The smell of her porpor's baos was replaced with incense. The smell of the coffee candies her grandmother held in her fanny pack was replaced with the smell of incense. She kept her eyes straightforward,

trying not to break. Her grandmother's smiling face in the photos reminded her that her porpor was in a better place, where she could gamble all she wanted without ever having to lose.

"Your grandma was a very good woman."

A short-framed woman with soft eyes came up to Carmen and placed her hands upon Carmen's. Carmen shifted her eyes from her grandmother's photo to the woman. The woman's hands held hers tightly.

"You have a good heart," Carmen's mother said. "Thank you for coming."

The words sounded automated. Carmen could only muster a nod.

"Your grandma was a close friend of mine," said the short-framed woman. Then she jiggled their interlocked hands slightly, her bracelets sounding throughout the quiet room. "We met each other back in the day. I have many stories about her I would like to tell you one day."

The woman slowly dropped Carmen's hands. Then she walked deeper into the room, conversing with one of Carmen's distant cousins. Carmen kept her eyes on the woman.

"Ma, who was that?" Carmen asked her mother, who only slightly shrugged. Her eyes were cast down. Her mother had her eyebrows furrowed as if she was remembering something from a long time ago. Her mother knew all of porpor's close friends because they were her aunts. Everyone close was just an auntie in the end. Her mother looked confused.

"I don't know, I don't remember her. She must have been someone she was close to in China," her mother said in a low voice. There was something about that woman that pulled at Carmen's interest. Her mother kept her eyes down—there was something more to that. Carmen didn't ask. She sat with her arms crossed as she watched the room and people talking about how her grandmother had helped them in the past, how she was there when so-and-so passed away.

Tears swept her cheek now and then as she washed the rice. She remembered her grandmother's cheeky personality as she moved through the kitchen. That was Carmen's task growing up, washing the rice her grandmother would make for her. When there was rice left in her bowl, her grandmother would tease her about how her husband was going to have as many dots on his face as there were

grains of rice left over. And that's why Carmen always finished her food.



IT'D BEEN several weeks since her grandmother's hands turned cold.

Now more than ever, Carmen found herself roaming Chinatown. She walked through the street vendors and felt the heat on her face, even in the chill of the night. One stand in particular caught her eye, because the short-framed woman from her grandmother's service stood there fixing the miscellaneous knick-knacks.

"Ah," said the woman, "Carmen, it's very good to see you." The woman spoke with life in her voice as she shuffled items from one row to the next. "It's been a long time. How have you been doing?"

Carmen nodded slightly as she took in the array of colors that this small stand held. "I've been better," Carmen answered. "It still feels like she's with us." She touched one of the small red lucky cat figurines.

"Your grandmother had so much life to her," the woman said. "I wish I was there for her more often. She was a very interesting woman back in the day. Very heroic." Carmen looked up from the cat in her hand.

"You mentioned you had a story about her." The woman nodded, then glanced around, her eyes going back to Carmen after viewing the street. She started packing up the stand. Carmen started to put the cat back down onto the table.

"Keep it," said the woman, nudging the figurine gently back into Carmen's hand. "Come on, help me close up."

Carmen obliged and helped the woman place the little objects into a bin. They went down a small set of stairs.

The woman's home reminded Carmen of her own, from the long stocks of bamboo that stood tall by the door to the nicely kept line of shoes. Carmen saw the woman's own little shrine with incense. The same smell that had always made her stomach sick filled her nose once again, so she searched for something else to focus on. The photo that stood behind the incense was of a man in his twenties. He had an empty smile.

Carmen placed her shoes next to the others as the short woman

ran to the kitchen to put on a kettle of water. She took the chance to look at the shrine more closely. This person was loved. Apples and oranges were placed in a bowl next to the photo.

"Your grandmother was a good friend to me back in the day," the woman said from the kitchen. "I'm glad I'm finally able to meet—uh, her grandchild. I always wondered what you and your mother would have been like." She stumbled over her words.

Carmen looked over and smiled softly. "I'm surprised we haven't met before." Carmen took a look at the picture frames that adorned the walls. The same man appeared in a lot of them, along with this woman. "I'm sorry, I still don't know your name."

"I don't think I ever told you," the woman replied, as she brought two cups into the room. The steam caused blush to settle on her cheeks as she handed one to Carmen. "You can call me Annie."

Carmen didn't expect her to use her English name. Maybe she was just so used to how stubborn her grandmother was. She had never wanted to adopt one. Maybe it was how American and simple her name was, but she almost didn't want to call her Annie. This woman was full of culture.

"Sit, sit," Annie chuckled. "You make me feel like a bad host."

Carmen chuckled and shook her head as she took a seat. "Can you tell me how you and my grandmother know each other?" she asked.

The woman moved the tea bag back and forth before taking out and placing it on a napkin on the coffee table. Then she answered: "Your grandmother and I met through marriage."

Carmen's eyebrows furrowed.

"I was to marry your grandmother's brother."

Carmen leaned slightly forward and said, "She didn't have a brother."

Her porpor had always joked that she was born into a sea of girls, and that her parents were so unhappy they had stopped trying for that lucky son. Carmen's mom always made sure Carmen was appreciated at home, calling her the lucky daughter because she won against all chances against her.

"She probably didn't tell you. He wasn't the best person. I can understand that."

Carmen didn't know whether to believe this person or not. But

then again, she never met her porpor's sisters, either. She didn't have facts to back it up.

"But he wasn't the worst person either," said Annie as she shrugged. She looked to the shrine. Carmen followed her eyes. "The marriage didn't last long." She tapped her fingers on the cup. "Your grandmother saved me," said Annie, beginning her story.

"I was 15. Your mother and her family lived a little ways away from me. You know how you have so many aunties? I used to play with them when I was younger. I think that's why your great-grandparents liked me so much. Your grandmother was my closest friend. She was a couple years older than me. She made sure she kept an eye on me like she did for her younger siblings, including her brother—my husband." She licked her lips. "She taught me how to play mahjong, too. She was so good at it—you must have played against her."

Carmen nodded.

"I think everyone saw the marriage coming. My parents were the ones that introduced the idea. I just remember how much your grandmother was against it. She argued and fought with her parents, and you know how upset you had to be back then to speak up against your parents?" Annie leaned back, the wrinkles from her smile slowly disappearing as she continued.

"Why was she against it?"

"That was something I had trouble understanding as a child. She kept saying that it wouldn't be good for me. I found out some time later—we were already married at this point—that, as your grandmother's brother grew, he got involved with bad people." Carmen leaned forward. "He was out every night. The stories I heard later on! I wouldn't tell you things like that," Annie continued.

"What did he do?"

"He was in the artifact business. I think that's why I ended up falling for him. Your great-uncle was a very smart man, but then again, not smart enough to stay away from those people. As he got deeper into the business, he was influenced to steal these ancient pieces. At the time, this was all very exciting to me. Living this lifestyle. Your grandmother and I, we didn't come from luxurious lives. This was the excitement I needed, or thought I needed, in my youth. Your great-uncle was a thief, a thief in every aspect. To anyone else he seemed like

a good businessman, but almost every other night, people would come to our house to trade off something he had took from that day." She brought the mug closer to her face. "We were living well off."

She sighed. "I had a daughter during that time. It was a dangerous period to have a child." She kept her eyes on the glass. "Your uncle was so mad. He wanted a son, like any other man. He was so ashamed. But he would come home drunk many nights asking to hold her." She shook her head. "That was the only time he loved her. Your grandmother came over so many times and asked me to run away with her. Your grandmother was ahead of our time. She would always tell me that we could do better together in America. That we could just take off. I should have listened to her back then, but I was selfish, hoping he would change."

"There's nothing selfish about that," Carmen said quietly. But Annie only shook her head.

"I should have been smarter," she stated. "Your uncle came home with..." Annie got up and went to another room. She was getting louder as she spoke. Carmen could hear her rattling for something. "He took something that he really shouldn't have." She came back out with a small wooden box. "It was worth more than anything he had taken before." She opened the box to reveal a golden chain with an amber stone. The stone was embraced by two golden dragons. It was a beautiful piece. Annie took the necklace out and handed it to Carmen. Carmen took it closer to inspect.

"When he brought this home, everything changed. Your uncle's business began to catch up with him. I remember when I first heard the banging on our door. Your uncle wasn't even in the house. It was your grandmother. She told me they were coming. When I asked who, she said everyone. The mob was coming to silence your uncle and the police were coming to arrest him. She asked me to leave with her again."

Carmen noticed Annie's hands were bunched up in her dress. She could see the color leaving her knuckles.

"I made the hardest choice I ever made." She looked at Carmen, a tear leaving her eye. "I knew if I left, they would track me down and worse things would happen. But there was *something* I could do, so I gave her my daughter—your mother."

“What?” Carmen couldn’t comprehend her next couple words. Annie had to repeat herself. Carmen placed the necklace back in the box. Her hands began to shake as she tried to put the pieces together.

“She raised your mother and you so well.” Annie placed her hands atop Carmen’s. Her grip was warm and calming. “I wanted to see you for some time, I just couldn’t bring myself to do it.” She smiled. “Your mother has trouble remembering me. I used to come by when she was younger, but it pained me to see her run to your grandmother, calling her mama. I stopped coming.”

Carmen brought her eyes down. Her grandmother wasn’t her grandmother.

She started to cry. She didn’t want to pull apart the memories that she had of her late porpor. She didn’t want to ruin the image she had in her mind. Was she a liar in that sense now? Carmen knew that this was something else out of her control, but it still brought tears to her eyes. It was all so overwhelming. It took control of her and left her frozen with these ideas that were so mind-blowing. Her childhood had just got uprooted. Her mother’s life got uprooted in the matter of seconds. She saw her porpor’s smile and how she always took her hand when she crossed the street. She saw the fragility and strength of her hands when they turned and folded dumplings at the table together. Did this change anything or everything?

Annie brought her hands to Carmen’s face and wiped the tears away. “This doesn’t change anything, child. Your porpor will always be yours. She was my best friend and my savior, your savior. She gave you a good life that I wouldn’t have been able to give to you.”

Carmen took a deep breath.



CARMEN TOUCHED the amber necklace around her neck as she looked at her tiles. She was close to having just the right hand, she just had to keep her smile hidden. Annie and her mother were laughing about some story. Carmen took a look at Annie, the woman she was just really getting to know. Her connection to Annie was something she was going to treasure. They decided to keep it a secret from Carmen’s mother, knowing it was too late to fix things, but it was enough for

Annie to get to know her daughter now. Although Carmen believed her mother should know where she truly came from, it was enough seeing Annie be happy with the child she had to let go, and she knew that in time, Annie would share this secret that held all their lives close together. Now the tiles rattled against the table. The gambling heart of her grandmother, always taking chances in the air.

She smiled as she set down the rest of her tiles. "Mahjong."



Callie Gonsalves

Avil Tran
The Gray Sky

FOUR.

FIVE.

TWIRLING the pencil between my fingers, my mind strays to the sky beyond my classroom window.

Grayness stretches out as far as the eye can see, looking calm and frustrating at the same time. Maybe it is going to rain.

That's what most might see.

But under *my* lens, as a hopeless dreamer, this grayness inspires fictions. That cloud could be a sad dragon. And *that* one could be a stormy sea for a world that sees our sky as their ocean. Today's sky could be the result of an irresponsible decision made by someone mighty above. It could also be a strike held by that same certain someone, a strike against humanity.

Nodding to myself, I decided to go with the last idea.

For a strike like this, a strike of three consecutive days, the sun god must be furious at every stupid thing we have done. The vast space up there, abandoned by the god, is dyed such a dull, gloomy color. I can hear in the air a strange combination of sounds coming from the trees rustling in the wind and from the students groaning in the cold as they seek warmth by hiding deeper in the comfort of their jackets. I hold mine tighter around me, thinking about how happy I would be if I were at home, on my bed, wrapped in my beloved blanket instead of sitting here in the class with this moody monster of a wind roaming outside.

"Now what exactly on Earth have I been doing?"

I mumble, looking down to the notebook that's lying wide opened in front of me with only a few lines of my writing across the white page. Looking up to the blackboard, I noticed that I have lost the lesson completely.

Too much for a few seconds of losing concentration.

My teacher is going on about something I now have no idea about, so I turn to my classmates. I jump a little bit on my seat, startled by the creepy scene. Wearing the same style of a white shirt with a blue tie and dark blue pants, each and every one of them looks like a clone of one another. All of their heads are down, hands are scurrying in desperation, trying to copy down everything that is on the board before the teacher erases it.

I sigh exasperatedly.

If the day I try to write a dystopian fiction ever comes, this scene—this repetitious scene—will be everything I need to shape and mold that world. I have grown sick of this monotony, where the teacher goes on and on with the lecture while everyone is trying to copy down all that is said and written on the board in their notebooks. It is even more boring than usual today because of the weather.

Snorting, I cannot help but think how ironic it is—comparing my current feelings about school now to how I felt back in the day, when I first started it.

I was six years old that year, all excited and thrilled for my first day of elementary school. I had my mother take me to the biggest bookstore in the neighborhood so I could choose for myself everything, from the pencil to the backpack, and later had them all prepared and ready-to-go a week before the first day of the semester. When the long-awaited day finally arrived, I woke up two hours earlier than I was supposed to, put on the school uniform on my own, ran around the house in it and woke up everyone in my family. I then came to school, met my teachers and classmates for the first time. To the six-year-old me, befriending everyone and studying well were the most natural things I could do. Friendships were simply formed out of genuine mutual interest. Something I did not know the day before, then learned with genuine eagerness. Another day to school was another happy memory.

Regrettably, that simple yet beautiful world of the six-years-old me has already ceased to exist. It has been replaced with this depressing, tedious world that the sixteen-year-old me is currently living in, where friendships no longer form simply based on mutual understanding, and where academic achievements now served as the status deviation among students and as excruciating pressure placed by the adults who agree that “academic achievements equal future socioeconomic success.”

I hold my blue jacket tighter around me, listening to the grumpy roars of the wind monster outside of the window. It is angry. I can feel it. It must be the suffocating grayness that has it reacting aggressively, and there is nothing it can do about it.

I just do not get it, that shared agreement of the adults. I do not get it even more when most of my high school classmates just follow that idea and let it remain as the cornerstone of their psyche without doing anything about it. Are academic achievements really all that matters? Then what about personal talents? Passions? Dreams? Shouldn't one figure those out first rather than forcefully learn everything only to then not know what to do with that knowledge later on? I do understand that not everyone can make a career out of what they love, but is it too much to cross out the time we need to discover our abilities and passions entirely and replace it with full hours of studying every subject there is in the curriculum to maintain high academic standing?

I glance at my classmates, once again feeling a chill run up and down my spine, not sure if it is because of the cold or because of something else. I then stare down at the palm of my hands on the desk.

Ever since the first days of high school, I have been told that there is something... strange about me compared to the others. How I honestly could not care less about the rankings, when it should be the top priority of any Vietnamese student—that's the first thing that made me stick out like a sore thumb from my peers. Right now, the fact that I am sitting here thinking about these "whys" instead of writing down everything my teacher is saying—that's another difference between them and me. I am aware that it's not like any of my friends never wonder about the whys behind those mentally abusive long hours of studying. But, unlike me—who finds these hours frustrating and unjustified—my friends just simply go along with the flow and find reassurance in the fact that the majority is doing the same thing as they do. That is the beginning of the line which separates me from my classmates. The line lengthens as I continue to place emphasis on my individuality by putting my dream above all while my peers put something else up there instead: their parents' wish for them to be at the top of the class. This difference then becomes the start of my self-marginalization. I find it harder and harder to ignore the dissimilarities in beliefs, values, and attitudes that keep growing in numbers between my peers and me. Different wavelength thus turns me into an alien in my classmates' eyes.

I let out another exhausted sigh, give up on dwelling in the contradictions between me and others, and decide to give it another try of concentration in the lecture. I quickly realize that I have started spacing out yet again as I found myself staring at my teacher blankly instead of focusing on what he is saying.

Pacing back and forth on the wooden platform placed at the very front of the classroom, my teacher goes on with his lecture in his deep, sentimental voice. He is in the middle of telling the historical background behind one of the poems that we are going to learn today, although I am not sure which poem is he talking about.

"This poem is widely acknowledged as the most significant work of our country's ancient literature. It is believed to be written during the Le dynasty, when the conflict between the Trinh lords in the north and the Nguyen lords in the south took place..."

My teacher is really knowledgeable and very passionate about his job. He tells us all the time about how proud he is of his occupation, but at the same time, he also tells us about how frustrating he is with the people who have more authority that limit what he can do as a teacher and what we can learn as students.

In literature—the subject he teaches especially, as most of the Vietnamese ancient poems were written in or related to ancient Chinese—my teacher will always show us the poems in their original version first, then compare the meaning in that old version to the modern translations and have us see how the words have altered in purpose. None of my literature teachers have ever done that before, because the amount of materials the students need to memorize to prepare for the exams is tremendous, hence the teachers would never teach anything that is not necessary for the exam preparation. My teacher never agrees with the principles that making the national exams all about testing students' memory. Because of them, the teachers have no other choice but to advise students to learn every poem by heart without understanding its context.

Unfortunately, one swallow simply doesn't make a summer. He still has to follow those regulations and does everything any other literature teacher in the country has to do: he makes sure the students thoroughly memorize the poems and the answers for possible questions that can appear in the national exams.

Once in a while, he turns around to jot down a sentence or two on

the blackboard. The sound of the white chalk running against the board is then sharply followed by the scribbling noise of pen and pencil moving on the papers. Amid the noise, it suddenly occurs to my mind that yesterday, or the day before that, I met with my teacher as I was on my way home from my guitar class. It was around 7 p.m., and I was waiting on my bike for the traffic light to turn green when he suddenly showed up beside me on his motorbike with his youngest child, around eight or nine years old, behind his back.

"Good evening, teacher. Are you on your way home?" I asked him.

"No, I am driving my kid to his tutoring session. I will be going home after though," he replied.

Before I could have the chance to voice out my surprise, the traffic light had turned green, and I had to bid my teacher and his child goodbye before I went on my way.

Now that I think about it, I should not be that astonished by the fact that my teacher's child has another class after school. Most of the kids that I know are the same as my teacher's child and unlike how I used to be when I was their age: happy-go-lucky, enjoyed every minute of being a child, and were not required to study more than what I should.

It is no longer that abnormal to see parents taking their children that are as young as my teacher's child to their tutoring classes and then returning home around eight or nine o'clock at night. It is no longer that abnormal to see kids as young as my teacher's son carrying backpacks that are half of their sizes, sitting behind their father or mother's back on the motorbikes on the way to their additional classes every day after school.

I have had a hard time trying to understand this shared belief of having their children attend as many classes as possible, because I could see that those classes have taken away all the time that a child could be... a child. Those long hours should not only be spent beside the desk, but also outside on the playground, on the sports field, or inside at the dining table with their family. I remember asking the parents of kids I know in the neighborhood, as well as my teacher, about the reason why they make their children study so much—and what I received was, surprisingly, the same exact answer.

"These children should get used to the pressure from a large amount of schoolwork now, or it will be hard for them later on."

I feel the corner of my lips rise in bitterness.

It is true, what the grown-ups said, about how hard it would be later if the child is unprepared for the pressure of the higher education. When I was in elementary school, my parents did not once registered me for an additional class. I thus entered secondary school unaware of the differences between the two levels of education. I was utterly shocked during my first days of middle school. I saw for myself those differences that I was not prepared for: the absurdly high level of difficulty in all subjects, the strictness of the teachers, and the insane amount of schoolwork that was given every day. Making friends was also no longer as simple. It took more than just a couple of friendly exchanges to befriend someone. I had to prove myself that I was either smart enough, or pretty enough, or rich enough, or interesting enough to befriend anyone. Everything just simply took a sharp, lousy turn for me the day I entered middle school, and I was thoroughly unready for any of it.

For the first time in my life, I failed an exam and received the worst mark I could ever possibly get. Since I was a student of the advanced class, that failure of mine to the teachers, to my classmates, and even to myself, was unacceptable. I had to ask my parents for a private tutor to make sure such a shameful thing would never happen again. I studied day and night to make up for that one bad grade, and to maintain my position and acknowledgment as “a student of the advanced class.”

My efforts, eventually, paid off.

That year, I stood proudly among my classmates in front of my middle school student body with the certificate for students with high academic achievement in my hands. Yet, at that moment, I remember feeling a surplus of strange irritation and anger break out in my heart instead of happiness and delight. It was only later when I had already entered high school and was asked about my dream career did I realize what I was angry about. All that time I had spent to achieve the standing equal to my friends in middle school had taken away from me the time I needed to explore myself and discover where my abilities and passions lie.

Hand probing underneath my chin, I stare at the outside of the window. All PE class have been canceled because of the weather, so the schoolyard is just as abandoned as the gray space above. I can see gusts of dust and fallen leaves start to kick up one after another. Spirally, the brown leaves fly up and away—following the flow of air to the unknown. The royal poincianas planted along the side of the school

buildings now grow dull in grayness and lifelessness as they shake hard in the strong winds. It is hard to remember how flamboyant they could look when their flowers bloomed so red during the summer that the trees looked like they were caught on fire. Rustling sounds of leaves and branches filled my eardrums as I lie face down on my desk, feeling the cold and hard texture of the wooden surface comforting me. I tiredly shut my eyes.

I guess that year was also when studying suddenly turned into a nightmare for me. After I had my revenge on that one bad grade, my pride was the only thing that kept me going and remaining amongst the top spots of my class ranking throughout the rest of my middle school years. However, in exchange for those crazy hours studying to maintain my place, my school life passed by in a blur. It was like there was a blank point in my life after that first year of middle school when I failed the exam. I could not remember learning anything, because what I was required to learn during middle school was all embedded on me using forceful memorization. Thus, once it was all over, those materials were entirely wiped out from my memory. I could not remember discovering anything new about myself either, aside from the fact that I could hold one hell of a grudge. My middle school years passed by in a whirlwind of hazy memories.

I recall the moment I held the certificate for students with excellent academic achievements in my hand in my middle school graduation ceremony. A quiet but bitter chuckle escapes my throat as I realize that is also the same moment when I decided to never give another damn about that certificate or the ranking ever again.

And look at where I am now, after that decision. I have become someone who has a dream, who knows what she wants and who has time to dwell in and learn about her inner self. I now longer see studying as a nightmare but as the guideline—like how it is supposed to be—for me to get closer to my dream of becoming a writer.

What a catch.

Suddenly, my trail of thoughts is interrupted by the chime of the school bell that signals the end of class. I let out a big yawn. Since the next one will start in the next five minutes, I thought that it would be best to remain in this sluggish but comfortable position and go for a quick shuteye. My plan, however, is disrupted as I overhear a conversation between my classmates.

“The weather is dreadful today. It is so going to rain later.”

“Nah, it will not.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“See that white space below the clouds? It means that they do not have the bases. My father said it only rains when the cloud base is presented.”

“But what if it is still going to rain?”

“Then look forward to it. ‘After every storm comes a rainbow.’ Isn’t that what they say all the time?”

After every storm comes a rainbow.

My lips curve upward at the sound of the saying.

Aneta Polak

Longing

I have yet to bury my feet into the deep soil
Of the grassy fields where my ancestors once walked.

To inhale the air of the ripe potato cellar
Where my great grandfather concealed the Bright Stars of
David
From the wrath of Hitler's bloodthirsty horde.

To put on my Krakowski Strój
And weave my hair into two thick braids
Tying them with a red ribbon
And sing the Barge hymn amongst the villagers
As we march in the procession
Down the gritty gravel street.

To taste my grandmother's homemade broth
With the last chicken she will ever slaughter herself
Concealing quivering, bloodstained hands
In the pockets of her eggshell needlepoint apron
As she gazes upon her granddaughter
For the first time in her life.

To sit in the creaky wooden pews
Of the gold garbed basilica
Where my parents married
All those years ago
And fold my hands in prayer.

To walk throughout the city's necropolis
With shrines of weeping Matka Boska
And place my head against the cold slab of granite

Under which my father rests
Where I will whisper
I hope you finally found your peace.

I have yet to bury my feet into the deep soil
Of the grassy fields where my family walks.



Owen Flores

Amanda Grace Shu

Do You Speak Chinese?

No. Those rising tones, tense as a violin
note suspended on a string, died with my grandfather
when I was too young to remember his funeral
except for the juice box I drank from:
Juicy Juice, green apple.
My dad doesn't speak the language, either—
all Chinese sounds like arguing to him—
but every accent he tries morphs in his mouth
into the shape of his father's tones.
His father told him, "Never go to China,"
hid guns behind every door, terrified
of a place he'd once called home, a country
that shot the family he'd left behind.
At my parents' wedding, only my aunt—tall, blonde,
with bones as sturdy as German limestone—
spoke his language. She'd been in the Chinese countryside
while tanks rolled through Tiananmen Square.
She spoke to him about a lake.
"No," he told her,
"do not say *the lake*. You must say
the beautiful lake by the three pine trees
standing alone against the autumn sky."

Mary Bekelian

A Fortune's Fool

IT WAS his fate to die, but it wasn't his fault. After all, if you saw me, walked through my doors, or made a deal with me, then you had to pay the ultimate price. I am Sandaramet, the goddess of the Underworld. Souls come here because they have no place to go, and it is my duty to watch over every single one.

The year was 2010. The town of Goris was unlike no other. It cried everyday as it streamed along the green pastures on the edge of the village. It was separated from the other villages by proud mountains rising high, blocking their view. What marveled everyone's eyes was the monastery of Tatev. It was beautiful. No. Breathtaking. All it took to get there was to ride the longest cable car in the world.

I watched them all express the love of their land and their lives. They were all benevolent to one another, except for one. Davit Hagopian. As he carried a sack over his head, grimy with sweat in the intense heat, he had coarse, black hair which stood out in all directions. He was a farmer like the others, but he wanted more. I could see it in his eyes, yet no one else could see me. I stalked him in the shadows, moving swiftly with the gust of wind, watching him.

A disgruntled man stormed past me. His name was Armen Ghulyan. He had a scar that stretched from his eye to the curve of his mouth, his light brown hair slowly turned grey, and premature lines ran around his face. His eyes were heavy and dark but were filled with purpose as he made his way over to Davit.

"Inch' yes anum?¹"

Davit's eyebrows twitched at the sound of Armen's voice. "Inch'pisi tesk' uni.²"

"Don't be smart with me, eshek.³" I saw Davit roll his eyes. "Glookhs mee harduki.⁴"

"What do you want?" Davit threw the sack he was carrying over to a pile with a big thwap. "I'm busy."

“It can wait.” Davit turned to the man with a solemn look. “I know it was you.”

“Neroghut’yun?⁵” He snickered.

“Yerek.⁶” When Davit shrugged, Armen raised two fingers. “Yerku haryur dolar⁷ was taken from me.”

A small smile crept onto Davit’s lips. “Well, maybe if you hid it better, then no one else would take it.”

In a sudden motion, Armen grabbed Davit by the collar of his shirt and brought his face close to his. The old man’s height did not intimidate him as he snickered; however, there was no doubt that he was strong. After all, even the strongest of men appeared weak.

“Agarki cnunt!⁸”

“I already knew that.” The young farmer’s silky voice matched his smirk.

With one shove, Armen glared daggers at him. “Gna.⁹”

Davit’s obnoxious grin was plastered on his face when he walked away from him. I despised the weak-minded beings who carried themselves like hounds marking their territory. The thought alone formed knots in the pit of my stomach, yet I allowed him to walk freely. My souls never dared to speak to me in such a way. Only I held the power, and if they knew what was good for them, they would obey, and they always did. Davit would end up like all the rest of them. If greed did not consume his mind, he would live a much happier life, but in the end, he would always be greedy, and I had my own way to teach him when our eyes met.

I was not paying attention on when he saw me, but it didn’t matter. I had carry out my mission through Davit. He didn’t say much, but he waved. I nodded in acknowledgement and walked away. He didn’t follow me, because I never planned on it. It was not time yet, so I waited patiently for everyone else to retire from their duties. All good things came to those who waited, after all.

The air surrounded me as I blended among the shadows once again. I saw the puzzled look on his face as he looked around. His face was bewildered, yet he continued on with his work, however, from time to time, he would stop what was he was doing to look for me, but he couldn’t. I was there, yet I was not. He was a khiyar mard¹⁰, like every other being who had walked this earth.

The sky slowly turned pink and purple, signaling the end of the day. Davit locked the hatch where his chickens were and carried the buckets of eggs back to his house. He then traveled down the dirt path to go home. His home was fit for a young couple, but watching Davit for so long, I knew it sickened him. Some people might have thought it was because of how his house looked. It was made completely out of white stone, with a tin roof and a broken window that needed to be replaced after a child kicked his ball through it. However, I knew the truth. Due to his lustful desires, he had been forced to marry a young woman at the age of seventeen.

When he went through the gate, he was greeted by a warm kiss of a woman at the steps of his house. He didn't have the same affection as she did when she greeted him, and his eyebrows always twitched at the sight of her. It was his wife, Nairi. She was a spiritual woman, as a wooden cross dangled around her neck, and she visited church early in the morning when Davit rose to work. A breathless warmth surrounded her, as if life had meaning, yet Davit didn't seem to care as his eyes roamed to her stomach.

As her belly grew more, she constantly prayed to the cross dangling around her neck, hoping that the child would live and be healthy. Her other two children were so frail and weak. When they were born, they did not do anything. They did not cry at all. I knew they were helpless from the moment she became pregnant. Only a mother could sympathize. I never enjoyed taking life at a young age, but it was a necessary evil.

His wife tried to help him by grabbing one of the buckets, but Davit refused. "Getseer.¹¹"

She paused to look at him. "Inch'u?¹²"

He looked down at her growing belly for a moment before he found her eyes again. "Duk' gitek', t'e inch'u.¹³"

Davit sighed when she wrapped her arms around him and kissed her husband tenderly, but she knew something was wrong when he snaked out of her grasp and went into the house, so she followed him inside. "Inch' e patahel?¹⁴"

"Voch'inch',¹⁵" he said, placing the buckets on the kitchen counter. He moved his hand to the knob on the bottom drawer and pulled. When the drawer got stuck, he cursed. "Bozi txa.¹⁶" Jiggling

the knob a couple times, the wood screeched, but it didn't seem to bother him.

Davit managed to fish something out. Nairi shook her head when he placed a cigarette between his lips. He took out a match and swiped the red tip along the stone wall, igniting it. Waving the match away with the flick of his wrist, he exhaled smoke as it fumed out of his mouth. Davit let out his toxic breath through the open window. Nairi crinkled her nose and furrowed her eyebrows. She went over to her husband and snatched the stick between his lips and threw it on the ground to put it out using her foot.

"Inch' yek' anum, kin?¹⁷"

"Stop it, Davit. Just stop it." When he looked away from her, she added, "You won't smoke in front of me. Not while I'm pregnant."

Davit closed his eyes and took a big sigh. If he hadn't calmed his nerves, he would have lost it. He placed his hands on her shoulders and spoke in a calming voice. "Siroons.¹⁸ Hongestahtsi.¹⁹ I had a long day today."

His tone seemed to have worked as she sighed. "I'm sorry." She looked down at his hands where a white pack was in his clutches. "Can you at least go outside to smoke? I don't want the ba—" "Alright." He cut her off. "I'll sleep soon..." He placed his fingers underneath her chin to make her look up at his emerald eyes. "So go to bed, alright?"

When she nodded, he leaned down to kiss her. He then placed his palm on her stomach, but it wasn't enough. Davit moved the fabric of her dress above her belly to feel her skin. It was smooth as silk. He ran his fingers along her curves. Placing gentle kisses on her neck, he traveled down to her stomach. He paused and placed his ear on her stomach to listen, but there was nothing. It was empty to him, yet he knew there was life deep inside her. No one saw, but the corners of my mouth curved up slightly, enjoying the interaction that they shared with one another. It almost made me feel guilty for what was about to come.

Nairi smiled and smoothed his hair as if she was petting him when he hummed and kissed her stomach. Davit chuckled at her gentleness. When she walked away, she gave him one last look before she went into the room next door. She gazed at him with such affection. Any man dreamt to be looked at like she how she gazed at him. Davit

watched her go in their bedroom, and he stared at her for a moment to watch her unbutton her dress as it toppled to the rotten hardwood floor. I went outside when he did. My body whirled through the air, and my hair twirled against the starry night.

He took out another stick as he lit it and puffed out more smoke. His mind was at ease again, without any distractions. Davit looked around and saw the lights in all the houses were turned off. There was no light. It was eternal darkness. The only light source he had was the moon shone above him.

I glided to the ground and watched him like a predator. Davit's eyes roamed around the neighborhood. Nothing peaked his interest; however, it didn't explain the widened eyes on his face. I stood by the plains across from him. My white cloak hung around loosely as it swept by the cool breeze, and a hood covered my face. When I met his eyes again, I brought my hands up and removed the hood, revealing my youthful self. My hair was the color of starlight, my eyes were bluer than the Dead Sea, and my skin was icy pale.

Our held gaze turned from seconds to minutes until I heard him say, "Ov yes du?"²⁰

The thin line on my face finally curved up. Instead of answering, I walked away. I knew he followed me when I heard him telling me to wait. My feet moved faster and faster until I found sanctuary in a cave about a mile or two away from his home. I traveled deeper, wanting him to follow, and he did. His footsteps echoed throughout the cave. I would stop in my tracks for him to catch his breath from time to time, until he finally caught up with me.

"Barev,"²¹ Davit.

His eyes searched for mine as if he tried to recognize me. "Yenk' menk' handipel?"²²

"We never had the opportunity to meet, but I know who you are."

"But I don't know who you are."

"Chisht yes."²³ No one alive does." I took a few steps towards him as he stared at me. "I have been around for a long time now, watching every poor soul suffer when they didn't deserve it." My eyes softened in sympathy. "I had moments of pain myself when I saw my own people butchered in Deir ez-Zor." When he scrunched his eyebrows together, I smiled and circled around him, gliding my slender fingers across his

shoulder blades. "The wailing of men, women, and children horrified me. I knew their time came to a horrific end." My fingers stilled at my own words. "You wouldn't understand. No one would."

Davit finally spoke, but he didn't seem to care for my empathy. "Inch' yes uzum indznits?²⁴"

"Nothing. I only wish to help your family."

I extended my hand as I gestured for him to look forward. His eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets as his mouth dropped in shock. Crates full of countless jewels and coins stood before him. I watched him with a sickening grin as he made his way over to the wealth. They were worth a king's ransom.

Davit turned to me as he said, "Yes ch'yem haskanum.²⁵ Why are you doing this? I don't even know who you are."

I went over to him and placed my cold hand on his cheek. He shuddered at my touch, but I didn't mind. "All will be explained soon." Our lips were only a few inches apart. "You will give me all I need in time." He stared deadly into my eyes, "This wealth here will go to your unborn child. He will inherit it when he sets foot on this earth." His breath stilled at my words, as if all hope vanished, but they soon returned when I said, "However, if something were to happen to the child, then this...." I paused to gesture at the crates before him. "It will be yours."

From where I stood, I could hear his breathing pick up quickly. His dark brown eyes stared deadly at the wealth. He took a few steps forward to touch it, then picked up a bright red gem and inspected it. He admired how it sparkled in the moonlight.

"There is one more thing." He turned to me as I continued, "I will visit you again eighteen years from now. During those eighteen years, you will live your life happily, however, on that day, you must be ready."

"For what?"

I brought my fingers to his lips. "Shh..." My mouth went to his ear as I whispered seductively, "T'e inch'u e kortsanum e pahy?²⁶" He seemed hesitant, so I said, barely above a whisper, "Ays ameny dziez hamar, Davit.²⁷"

What a foolish human.

The poor soul gained his courage as his lips locked with my own.

We parted lips as I plunged my tongue inside. I began to suck. Something sweet trickled down my throat. His blood. I did not consume enough to kill him, yet he nearly slumped down to the ground, so I held him.

When we parted from each other, he stared into my eyes as if he was searching for my soul. I smirked, as I knew something that he didn't.

Davit went to the crates and gazed at them in wonder. When his back turned to me, I gained the opportunity to blend into the shadows. Wisps of air twirled around me. I gushed to him, feeling his dark locks move against my body. He turned around, only to find nothing. Davit looked around, yet I was nowhere in sight. At least, not to him

He hurriedly grabbed the first crate he could carry and rushed back home, carefully not dropping any coins or gems along the way. He repeated this process until dawn. Davit sat on the stool against the wall, twirling one of the coins.

As he counted the coins, he felt his eyelids closing and his head dropping. I watched his wife wake up from her slumber as she went into the living room to find her husband. She looked at all the crates in astonishment and wrapped her arms around him. He stared at the woman, embracing him. A sad smile formed on his lips. When she asked him where he found it, Davit explained how I lured him into the cave and gave it to his unborn child. She kissed him repeatedly, then kissed the wooden cross around her neck. She kissed her husband again with such tenderness, yet he did not seem to have the same passion as she did. Nairi sensed it as she cupped his face in her hands.

"What is it?" I shook my head, begging in my mind for her to leave. "Davit? What's—"

A strangled gasp ripped from her throat. She looked down to see a knife plunged in her stomach. His cold green stare painted greed as she collapsed to the floor, gagging, holding onto her wound. She prayed that her child would be alright, but it was too late. I had already come to collect him, yet they couldn't see me. My hands went through her stomach and reached deep inside. I brought my hands back to my body and cradled an infant in my arms. It did not cry, and it did not move.

Nairi tried to crawl away as blood gurgled in her mouth. She

released a jolt of pain when he loomed over her body and stabbed her again, and again, and again until she drew her last breath. I bent over and placed my hand on her eyelids, closing them. My hand went over to her own. I tugged, and she stood in front of me. Her eyes watered when she saw her corpse on the floor. She cupped her hands and shielded her eyes as she wailed uncontrollably.

“Inch’pes karogh yek’?²⁸” she screamed at her husband repeatedly, yet he couldn’t see or hear her.

I held her child with one arm and placed a hand on her shoulder, squeezing gently. Her sobs ceased when she turned to look at me. “Zhamanakn e.²⁹”

“For what?”

Instead of answering her, I took her hand and traveled down to the core. She trembled and hugged herself. The cold never bothered me. I watched all my souls hugging each other, especially families. As I made my way past them, they noticed me and immediately bowed their heads, avoiding eye contact. Every time I passed a child, I raised their heads and gave them a kiss on their foreheads. They always smiled at my affection.

“Where am I?”

I turned to her with a sad smile and said, “Tun.³⁰” She nodded and looked down in disappointment, so I brought my fingers to her chin and made her look up. “There is no need to be upset anymore. Duk’ gtnvum yen khaghaght’yan.³¹”

She nodded and looked at the child in my arms. I handed the infant to her, and her eyes watered again. Nairi couldn’t keep her eyes off of the child. What mother could? Her lip twitched at the thought of her own husband taking her and her unborn child’s lives. Little did she know that he had eighteen years before his time came, and I knew she would rejoice to find him with her.

I watched Davit through the remainder of his days. He moved to the capital of Yerevan a few days after his wife’s death. Every citizen was jealous of his grand house. It was too big for one person. Fields of carnations, orchids, and lavenders enveloped the area. His home was made of marble, and it was encrusted in solid gold. The statue in front of his home stood tall with pride. A marble hawk rested on his shoulder, while the statue’s arm extended as if he reached for something. It

was my husband, Aramazd, the creator of the universe. If he were there, he would have snickered. Aramazd was never fond of men who slaughtered the innocent. He would have sent Davit to the depths of the Underworld, where the most vile men screamed in anguish for all eternity for the crimes they have committed.

When the air wrapped around me, I flew inside and watched him propping himself on his leather chair, drinking bourbon. He scrunched his eyebrows and gave a disgusted face as it burned his throat. Davit gave a deep gulp and grunted. When he filled himself another drink, a chill ran down his spine, but he shook it off.

“Drinking is a horrendous habit.” My voice filled the room.

His cup shattered to floor when he saw me as if a ghost from his past came back to haunt him. “How did you get in here?” He gripped the edge of the mahogany table when I didn’t answer. “Get the hell out, you Qatz,³² or I’ll kill you!”

My eyes lit up with mischief as I said, “Why? I gave you everything you wanted.”

“Why are you here?” He went into the kitchen, so I followed him.

“Have you forgotten?” The next words came in a whisper. “I said in eighteen years on this day, I would visit you again.” He stared coldly at me when I continued, “Just like your wife, you will be nothing more than a memory.”

The realization dawned on him as he repeated, “No. No. No.” He grabbed a knife by opening a drawer and pointed it at to me. “Get out, Agarka.³³ Get out!”

“Your tongue is dangerously sharp. You need to have care in how you speak. You never know whom you might encounter.”

The top of the blade caressed my chest. “Stay back!”

I placed my finger on the cold blade and glided it along my finger until I reached the hilt. “Do it then if it will relieve you.” I grabbed his hand and pressed the tip against my chest, where my heart was. “This was all for you, remember?”

He bellowed like a wounded boar as he plunged it deep into my heart. I stood there with my thin line curving up into a wicked grin. He stared at me for a second before he clenched onto his chest and gagged like he was in pain. Davit collapsed, crashing into the glass

table behind him. There were shards embedded in his back and his arms. He heaved in air as if it would save him.

I took the knife out and tossed it aside. Blood seeped out from my wound, yet I was in no pain, because it was not my blood. It was his. I leaned down and took his hand while the life seeped out of him.

ENDNOTES FOR “A FORTUNE’S FOOL”

Mary Bekelian — A Fortune’s Fool

1. What are you doing?
2. What does it look like?
3. Jackass.
4. Don’t iron my head, which means “don’t give me a headache.”
5. Sorry?
6. Yesterday.
7. Two hundred dollars.
8. Son of a whore.
9. Go.
10. Dumb/Useless creature.
11. Stop.
12. Why?
13. You know why.
14. What’s wrong?
15. Nothing.
16. Son of a bitch.
17. What are you doing, woman?
18. Darling or Beautiful.
19. Relax.
20. Who are you?
21. Hello.
22. Have we met?
23. You’re right.
24. What do you want from me?
25. I don’t understand.
26. Why ruin the moment?
27. This was all for you, Davit.
28. How could you?
29. It’s time.
30. Home.
31. You are at peace.
32. Bitch.
33. Whore.

Corey D. Cook

“dog lifts his leg...”

dog lifts his leg
on ostentatious Trump sign
free speech

2.

VERY SPOOKY BUT nothing's happening. You talk to the air a bit, trying to goad something into responding. No dice. Why did you decide to come here again?

- *Recall the history of this place—6*

3.

FORTUNATELY, the laundry room in the basement is notorious for scaring students into never doing laundry. For some reason, the whole downstairs of the dorm is unfinished, with a hard concrete floor and visible foundation. Rumors circulate about the founder of the college having summoned a demon to do... well, reports vary. It is like the game telephone. Some people think it was for money, some for love. Regardless, no one likes to be down in the laundry room for too long, citing chills, the lights flickering or general uneasiness. Perfect place to try and find something... supernatural.

You decide to wait until midnight, for extra spook factor. Your roommate notices you pacing anxiously back and forth in your room.

"What's up?" She asks. You eye her. She's not been the most supportive of your hunt for the supernatural. Usually scoffing, and calling you a big dumb fool.

"Gonna scout out the laundry room." Drat your inability to keep secrets.

"Why? Wait, don't tell me."

"Demons." Even saying it out loud makes your spine tingle.

She rolls her eyes. "Sure."

"I'm not asking you to come." You say.

She nods. "Yeah, but I'm still going to. You'll probably hurt yourself otherwise."

Seems like she's pretty serious about that. You could try to tell her off, but who knows if she'll actually listen.

- *Begrudgingly agree to let her come—7*
- *Tell her she can't come—14*

Coffee Isn't So Bad After All

RUBY OPENED the white double doors, moving through the loud and bustling noise of the dining hall.

Damn, she thought, *why do they act like they're back in high school?*

While walking past the tables that were filled with students, Ruby spotted her best friend Noah sitting at the small rectangular table. She walked towards him.

"Hey, Rube!" he shouted. Then he crossed his arms and stared at his best friend. "We need to decide, immediately, who is the best girl in Kim Possible."

"What do you mean?" said Ruby. "We already know who the best girl is."

"I know, right?" said Noah. "But there are still morons out there who think otherwise."

But Ruby wasn't sure who he meant, so she waited for clarification.

Noah stirred his boba milk tea around. "I already said her name, Rube."

"What? Kim is definitely not the best girl! It's clearly Shego. I can't believe you're one of the morons who think that."

"Of course Kim is the best girl!" said Noah. "She's athletic, intelligent, and can kick ass. Think about it, you uncultured swine!"

"*I'm uncultured!?*" said Ruby. "I think you're talking about yourself there, buddy. Shego can shoot a green energy beam from her hands, which is more badass than what Kim can do."

Ruby glared at Noah, who did the same back at her.

This debate caught the attention of other Redwood University students. They gave odd looks and whispered to one another about the two having a dispute about Kim Possible.

Well, Ruby thought, *this is embarrassing*. She looked down on the white-tiled floor of the cafeteria and pinched the bridge of her nose. When she looked up, she sighed. "I'll just take a seat."

“Couldn’t agree more,” said Noah as he turned his body in the chair facing the table.

Ruby took a seat across from him.

“So, how was your fiction class?” Noah asked, continuing to sip his tea.

Ruby shrugged. “It’s fine, though our assignment is quite hard.”

“What’s the topic this time?” Noah placed his head on his hand, looking at her.

“Love.” Ruby sighed while tapping the table. “

That should be easy.”

Ruby looked at him as if he had grown another head.

“Yes, but I don’t want it to be sappy and cringy like some love stories are, you know? I think Professor Hatheway is just a sucker for love stories.”

“What makes you say that?” Noah raised a brow at her.

“She wouldn’t shut up about being married and all the romance movies she’s been watching,” said Ruby, sighing deeply as she put her head on the table, remembering the professor’s nonstop rambling about how cute the “I’m flying” scene in *Titanic* is.

“Yikes, that must’ve been rough.”

“You have no idea,” said Ruby, slumping into her seat. She sighed. “I’m struggling to come up with an idea for this topic.”

Noah picked up a fry. “I mean, if you’re struggling, you should go to Late Latte Cafe,” he suggested while munching on the fry.

“Oh, the university’s famous coffee joint?” Ruby took a fry, then took a bite out of it.

“Yeah, though that’s not all. The cafe is also popular because of the employees, and how friendly and good looking they are.” Noah took another fry he had on the table.

Ruby raised her brow at him, unsure where this conversation was heading. “And how does this cafe relate to me writing a love story?”

Noah looked at Ruby as if she had grown another head.

“What? Was it something I said?”

“To gather ideas,” replied Noah straightforwardly. “I thought you knew that, since you’re a writer,”

“Wow, gee, thanks, I *clearly* wasn’t hurt by that,” Ruby stated with

a deadpan expression on her face. She stood up from her seat and started walking towards the exit.

“Eh? Rube, where are you going?” Noah asked across the room, gaining the attention of some students while the others were too drowned in their own world to notice.

“Where else? Late Latte Cafe!”

“Oh, Rube, I know you don’t like coffee, but my friend Hyunjin makes the best coffee on campus. You really should try it out!”

Ruby stuck her arm up in the air and gave a thumbs up while pushing the white wooden double doors open, leaving the cafeteria back to its usual bustling self.

Then she heard Noah’s chair scrape back across the floor as he stood up from his seat. “RUBY,” he shouted, “COME BACK! WE STILL NEED TO DECIDE WHO’S THE BEST GIRL IN KIM POSSIBLE!”



WHO’S TALKING ABOUT ME? Ruby thought, as she continued to walk through the 1st floor in the west wing of the building. She then spotted a wooden black sign with the words *Late Latte Cafe* in cursive. *So this is the place...*

Ruby walked in to see college students bunched up together at a few tables and couches. She looked around the cream room and saw light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, grey tile floors, and plants hanging around the tables and on the wall shelves.

The atmosphere overall was mellow and tranquil, with students chatting over coffee and tea, with pop music softly playing in the background—unlike other cafes or coffee shops, which played obnoxiously loudly. *I should work on my stories here more often*, thought Ruby. She shook her head as she was about to get distracted by the aesthetic room instead of what she was really here for in the first place.

Ruby walked up to the cash register counter, where no one was standing at the moment. She then looked up at the digital menu board, looking at the different options, unsure what to get.

“Hi,” a deep voice said. “What can I get for you?”

The voice made Ruby jump—almost like Shaggy and Scooby when they see a ghost, except not as extreme.

She slowly looked up to see a tall guy with short brunette hair and brown eyes. He was wearing a white dress shirt with a black apron on top. The apron, upon closer inspection, had a small white coffee cup on the right breast.

“Sorry,” said the guy, with a soft chuckle. “Didn’t mean to scare you.”

“No, it’s fine, um...” Ruby looked at his name tag. “Hyunjin? Oh, so you’re the one Noah mentioned.” She was a bit astonished to have met him already.

“You know Noah?” asked Hyunjin, raising his brow.

“Yeah,” Ruby replied. Then she smiled. “He’s my best friend.”

Hyunjin nodded, then returned the smile with one of his own. “What brings you here?” he asked.

“Ah,” she said. “Noah recommended it to me so I could be inspired for this writing assignment I’m doing. But also,” she said, while fiddling with her thumbs, “to try your coffee. He told me you make the best coffee in the entire campus. I’m not much of a coffee person, but he insists on me trying yours.”

“Why don’t you like coffee? Is it because it’s bitter?”

All Ruby could do was nod her head at him. He then put his right hand on his chin while looking up, thinking for a few seconds. As he took his right hand away from his chin, he turned it into a fist and tapped it on his left palm.

“Got it! I’ll start making it for you!” Hyunjin hummed with a smile, walking to the back as he stopped in his tracks. He came back to the counter and said, “Oh, I never got your name, by the way.”

“It’s Ruby Zhou,” she told him with a small smile on her face.

“Ruby, huh? Cute name for a cute girl. And that’ll be \$2.99,” said Hyunjin, smiling back and winking at her as she rolled her eyes.

“Thanks... I guess. Though what exactly am I drinking?” She looked at him with an unsure look on her face while giving him the exact change. Hyunjin put the money in the cash register. He placed a finger up to his lips and walked away to make the drink for her.

Taking the hint, Ruby took a seat at a small rectangular wooden

table with two chairs placed across from each other. Then she took out her laptop and started typing away, finishing other assignments. She stuck her earbuds in, listening to Queen. As “Bohemian Rhapsody” started playing, she blocked out the sounds around her while bobbing her head to the chorus.

Five minutes passed by, but it seemed like more than that. Then she felt a tap on her shoulder, causing her to flinch as she took out her right earbud. Hyunjin stood there with a smile on his face.

“Here’s your drink, madame,” he said in a playful tone while he placed the paper coffee cup down on the table.

Ruby played along and replied, “Why thank you, kind sir.”

The two of them looked at each other for a second, then burst out laughing.

Hyunjin then stopped laughing and said, “Okay, now take a sip and let me know what you think.”

“All right.” Ruby hummed, lifting the cup and taking a sip from the coffee he made for her. She could taste sweetness instead of the bitterness of most coffees. *Vanilla and a hint of espresso*. She looked up at him.

“Is this a vanilla latte?”

He nodded vigorously with a closed-eyed smile on his face.

“Ding ding, that’s correct!” He replied quite happily while applauding her, as if she had won a prize at a carnival.

“I like this a lot. Thanks for making the drink, Hyunjin,” she said with a small grin, which he happily returned back.

“I’m glad you like it. After all, I am the best coffee barista on the campus. Well, I have to go back to the counter now. Enjoy your drink.” Hyunjin winked at her.

“Alright, and will do, thanks,” Ruby replied as he walked back behind the counter. She then lifted the cup, about to take another sip, until she noticed a letter written in black marker behind the cup. As she turned it around, the message was:

Can I get your number? Because I like you a latte. xxx-xxx-xxxx

— —HYUNJIN ♥

A smile appeared on her face without her noticing. She looked up to see him getting another customer's order. Ruby took a sip from her vanilla latte.

"Coffee isn't so bad after all," she thought. Sounds like a nice title for my love story assignment.

Stephen Haven

The Absurd Silence of Nature's Pauses

If only you are listening there is somewhere
An old refrigerator straining to beat the heat.

Footsteps from the floor above, the still settling
Of an ancient house. Wind chimes

From your neighbor's yard, beauty and randomness
Wrapped like serpents around some Hippocratic staff.

First nothing, then the furnace kicks in,
Some old dryer tosses a pair of shoes

As if they had nowhere in particular to go.
Beyond the distant drum of those hot circles

When my son lay in a Beijing hospital
Bit by a bug, listening through 105 degrees,

No one coined the word for all that ticked in him,
Traveled from some Massachusetts woodland,

The whirl of the electric clock, the polyglot
MDs finally scribbling doxycycline.

In the hiss of that hospital room, two continents
Held their breaths, until he was his own

Wind instrument, tones, rests drawn from the air
That filled the gap between his teeth. Without measure

And without end, over slow coffee
The traffic slushes by, a plane passes overhead.

4.

As your newly possessed friend steps forward, her eyes rolling back in their sockets, you try to think of everything you know about possession.

Of course! You have to try an exorcism... but you don't have any holy water. As you back away from her, you realize that you do have something that might help... that water bottle of Kool-Aid. You recite Latin words you remember from all those films you've seen, (which are obviously accurate), and take out the holy Kool-Aid. With a final prayer that the demon be banished, you open the bottle and upturn it on her head.

Your demon infested roommate laughs. "Kool-Aid?" She says, "I *invented* Kool-Aid."

fuck.

YOU DIE. THE END.

Ryan Bottitta

Eye of a Needle

The heavens pour from your eyelids
Overflowing, trickling down
The softness of your face.
I think of all I refused to believe,
It isn't easy for me,
Right in front of me lies a question,
One I asked constantly,
But now am borderline believing
The possibility.
Each time your eyes lock with mine
A piece of me enters its crystal gates
Bringing me to the place that I find safe.
In your eyes, I see bliss;
Beneath the surface, there lies love.
What would possess me to look
Anywhere else for guidance?
For tranquility? For peace? Everything
I desire lies here before me
Even angels, should they exist—
God would they be jealous; jealous
That there is yet another heaven,
In the form of a being
As breathtaking as you.

Natalie Bastille

My Father Was a Great Cook

MY FATHER WAS A GREAT COOK. Every breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I was always curious about what new dish he would come up with next. However, he had a talent for making delicious food hideously *ugly*.

He used to tell me, "Don't eat with your eyes, son! That's what your mouth is for!" I'd force myself to uncomfortably dig my fork into the black meat. I never had the heart to tell him, "Your food looks disgusting."

While I dreaded its strange appearance, the moment I bit into the leathery slab, I always found myself pleasantly surprised. I remember the 'black slab' well, because it was actually one of my favorites. It had a savory taste, and his addition of homemade spices made it even more so. Never was it too tough, it was always cooked at the right temperature and time, crafted in perfection with my father's skill. I remember always wanting more, although I could barely look at it at first. This is what made my father a great cook, and it was impressive he could make something seemingly repulsive mouthwatering.

It wasn't until I got older that I realized I greatly admired his work. My father's cooking helped me develop an open mind that has greatly impacted me in adulthood. I believed it was something everyone should experience at least once.

I was twenty-five at the time when I asked him if I could have a few of his recipes. I had just become engaged to my wife at the time, and I dreamed of sharing my father's legacy with my future children. To my dismay, he refused. I was disappointed. I didn't understand why. Most families loved to pass down their cooking from generation to generation. When I pressed further, he shook his head, "I'm sorry, Ryan. I can't. I promised your grandfather."

I didn't know much about my grandfather, he passed away before I was born. Whenever I asked my father about his passing, he would change the subject. I never understood why he was so secretive, or why

he felt like he could never open up to his own family. My mother said she tried to crack him, but he wouldn't tell her either. I used to believe that the recipes were a way for my father to cope with his passing, protecting them and guarding the memory of his father.

One night when my wife was on a business trip, my mother invited me over for dinner. I asked what dad was cooking, and she said that he was keeping it a surprise. I was eager for the nostalgia.

It was 8:30 PM when I arrived, a half-hour early. I was starving. I wasn't used to the old eating schedule; we always ate late. When I started living with my wife, that changed.

"You eat at nine?!" She said in surprise.

"When am I supposed to eat?" I said.

"We'll eat at six, from now on." She shook her head. "Sleeping with a full stomach? Gross."

When I parked my car, I noticed the lights to my father's shed were on. I thought he must have forgotten to turn them off, because he'd be busy cooking in the kitchen by then. His shed was strictly off limits when I was a kid, and even as an adult, I felt like I was being a bit of a rebel. I'd never been in the shed before, nor did I ever go against my father's word. I was a bit of a goodie two-shoes, I suppose.

I didn't think much of it when I saw the door ajar, light filtering to the outside. What I heard, made me slow my pace.

Thunk.

Crack.

Squish.

Thunk.

Crack.

Squish.

Thunk.

Crack.

Squish.

I reached the door silently and took a peek.

My father raised a heavy cleaver above his head, and slammed it

down on a cutting board, cutting off the head of a dark, leathery... monster. Black, inky ooze spilled off the table, dripping to the ground in a thick, gurgling puddle. It was when I saw its bulging eyes that I felt nauseated. What looked like a hundred eyes shifted around in jerky movements, watching every move my father made.

And then at me.

Its black, empty pupil enlarged as it reflected the look of horror on my face.

Then, I booked it. I ran as fast as I could, hoping my father wouldn't hear the sound of my feet over the heavy thump of his cleaver. When I reached my car and hovered my hand over the door handle, my mother suddenly called from the doorway.

"You're here! Oh honey, come here, I've missed you so much!" My mother opened her arms for a hug.

I stood frozen for a minute, mind racing. Does Mom know? Should I tell her? What would she do if I told her? Where would we go? Who would we tell? *What do I do?*

I let out a shaky breath and acted as if nothing had happened.

I gave her a hug and feared she would be able to tell I was shaking. I felt like I was out of my body, like I wasn't in control. I was on autopilot, asking my mother mundane questions of, "So how have you been?" and "How's Uncle George?"

It wasn't until my father came into the room that I felt myself slip. I never thought much of it before, why he came through the back door.

He greeted me and gave me a bear hug, telling me how happy he was to see me. I didn't doubt my father's love, not even once, but I couldn't help but feel a disconnection in that moment, a disconnection I'd feel forever. How did he get that *thing*? What *is* that thing? What *else* has he been cutting up?

My mother and I sat down at the table. I faked a smile and surprise when he brought out my 'favorite' dish.

"I made this special for you!" I remember him saying, a smile on his face as he placed the steaming plate in front of me.

I stared at it, wondering, *what have I been eating all these years?*

"Don't eat with your eyes, son! That's what your mouth is for!" He chuckled.

I laughed nervously. “Hah, I just can’t believe it’s been so long!”

I cut into the black flesh and watched as neither of them seemed to be phased, including my father. I couldn’t help but picture the bulging eyes shifting to watch my every bite. The taste was exactly as I’d remembered, but now I knew it was from this... thing, and it didn’t have the same effect. The part that disturbed me the most was why he kept it such a secret. Was there something bad about eating these... things? I can only assume there are more, I mean, what else was he serving me? I’ve had deer, I’ve had bear, I’ve had it all. I knew that this was something not normal. I wanted to ask him, what the hell I was eating, but I couldn’t. I just, couldn’t.

By the end of the meal, I felt sick. I told my mother I was tired and I had a busy day ahead of me. Of course, she offered for me to stay, but I declined her offer, maybe a little too eagerly, giving an excuse that I had to be somewhere early in the city. I wanted to get out of there.

As soon as I left and got on the highway, I vomited on the side of the road.

I haven’t gone back to my parents’ house in five years, and I’ve always made up an excuse. I tried my best, to have them over instead, and not let my father cook.

Unfortunately, I no longer see my father. He’s been missing for a month after a ‘hunting trip’. My mother is in denial, insisting he’s just lost in the forest, but I know the truth. At least, I think I do, but I will never tell her. I miss my father deeply, regardless of what happened. I debated on telling the police about what I saw that night, but I don’t think it’d do any good, nor would they believe me. I just pray that my father didn’t suffer from god knows what, and I never have to see—or eat—that *thing* again.

Anonymous

Woman in the Garden

I watch her from the window,
working in the yard.
I see her on her knees,
as twilight stumbles from the sky
wiping sweat and pulling weeds
with the patience of Sisyphus
(and his cheery persistence too)

She bows her head and
the curve of her neck catches
the last of the light as she
stoops to smell the roses.
I watch her wandering eyes settle softly
on the delicate corpse of a baby bird.

She is still a child it would seem,
from what I can see from the window,
though her hair is grey now
and the years ring her bent neck
as she studies the little broken beak.

The coming darkness weighs heavy
on the woman in the garden and so
she buries the bird
with the same solemn face she wore when
she bit the apple,
the sun and the world and my eyes on her shoulders.

Meg Scribner

Spring Memory

As water droplets trickle down
My cold, red face
The spring rain soaks my hair

It trickles onto my cheeks
Leaving them rosy and hot.

It's a quiet morning
With the subtle murmur of car engines
And a little dog
Napping by the window.

Cambridge is still asleep.

Meg McCarney
In My Dreams

there are sixteen of us—
versions of ourselves
we haven't tried to push
in front of traffic, poison,
or shoot yet. they are staring
at us and we are trying to say
sorry, but we can't look in mirrors
or offer handshakes anymore.

we're infants flailing in the ocean;
beating against the tide, our chubby
mouths beg for oxygen. a mask drops—
maybe from a plane, maybe from
the sky, but always out of reach.
we are lifted from the water and
placed in the hands of someone
more capable, but it's too late.

we're bank robbers; i'm yelling
loud enough to drown out my
conscience and i refuse to stop
until i see civilian tears. as i
brandish my weapon, you push
the children outside and tell them
to run before we fire. there are tears
behind my balaclava—the last thing
i feel before we implode.

the train is coming; it's always
coming. somebody has to pay,
some karmic justice we'll never

understand. we are racing, trying
to beat each other to the tracks,
but i'll never let you win. in the
aftermath, you sit on the sidewalk
and teach your hands to hold something
besides a carving knife.

we are awake.

Flight of the *Marigold*

BY THE NEXT DAY, their pursuers were much larger than a dot over the endless water. The airship following them was slick and speedy, and had been gaining on them since last evening. Without a fully-functioning engine, Captain Aliha Brier had to acknowledge that they had no chance of escape. She'd resorted to making plans that she never would have made before, not in her years as captain of the *Marigold*, in order to protect their royal charge.

"Watch out, Aliha," said her sister Nette. "*Asshole* approaching."

"Language," cautioned Brier.

Nette rolled her eyes and rubbed her cast.

"Little Crow," said Brier, "I know you're stir-crazy, but it will heal—"

"With time," mocked Nette.

"And in that time," said Brier, nodding in the direction of their charge, "watch your mouth around the princess."

Nette rolled her eyes again. "I don't think there's any name that fits them better," she said. "And they've been on our butt for a while now. Ergo: The *Asshole*."

Brier turned to Kayla, hoping that her Highness could shut Nette up. Instead, the heir failed to hide a grin behind her dainty hand. Brier decided to let it go. Besides, she had to finish double checking every chart she had for the area. By the time she'd made sure their rusty Antithum socket would keep the ship in the air, they had reached the fog wall marking their destination.

"Is that the Giant's Teeth?" Kayla joined Brier at the wheel of the *Marigold*, her sharp green dress blooming as the wind whipped around them. The two looked out at the mass of fog, "I thought it would be more... Teethy."

"Look closer." Brier advised.

Kayla squinted. Through the fog wall, the shadows of great jagged stone towers loomed over them, and as they approached it became

clear that the stones were floating over the ocean. The Teeth were one of the original sources of Antithum. They weren't entirely made from the stuff—Brier supposed they would be much higher up if they were—but they did contain enough to keep them floating a couple stories off the ocean's surface. The high concentration of Antithum generated enough fog to ward off most who would dare to cross through them.

"Well, that is... daunting," Kayla said. "Are you confident in your ability to navigate through?"

"No. But we haven't got much of a choice at this point."

As the fog, and the Teeth inside, came ever closer to them, so did their pursuers. Just as the *Marigold* was about to breach the fog, the radio next to the wheel crackled to life. Brier groaned as a scratchy, thin voice came across, "*Marigold*. Ahoy, *Marigold*. This is Eobald Prawn of the—" Brier reached for the radio to shut it off, but Nette was faster.

"Greetings, *Asshole*," Nette said with a smirk in her voice, pulling the receiver away from her older sister.

There was a deep pause.

"Is this right?" the voice asked away from the microphone. Then: "Ahem. Who is this?"

"First Mate Antoinette Brier, of the A.U.A.S *Marigold*." Captain Brier grabbed for the receiver, but Nette danced out of the way. "I noticed you've been on our behind for quite some time. Anything we can assist you with?"

"*Marigold*, we know that you're providing safe harbor for the heir of House Tygres. On behalf of the House Vulpes, we ask that you—"

"I'm sorry, *Asshole*, but that information is only for the three *ruling* houses, and the Queen herself." Nette's eyes twinkled.

"Are we in range yet? No?" asked the voice.

"*Finish up*" Brier hissed at her sister, gesturing at the approaching Teeth.

"*Asshole*, unfortunately, we'll have to cut off radio communication soon. You know how radio signals tend to whizz out around them big pillars."

"*Marigold*, do not stay on your course." The voice was speaking quickly now, "You're making a very big mistake."

"Maybe you'll have to try and catch us, huh? Unless you'd rather keep your fancy ship."

"Gah! Damn it, go around. We'll get them when they—" Brier shut the radio off and snatched the receiver from Nette.

"Do you have any idea how dumb that was?" She said, and Nette shrugged.

"It worked, didn't it?" Nette pointed behind them. The *Asshole* turned its course away from them and was now headed east of the Teeth.

"It didn't provoke them, at the very least." Brier muttered.

"Captain, if I may, you might want to pay attention to our course." Kayla interjected as the first wisps of mist began to curl around them, "I do not think it would help if Nette's... victory was undercut by us dashing against the stones."

"Aye." Brier returned to the wheel, and Nette to leaning against the bridge's rail. They were right at the brunt of the fog, and the stone teeth rose above them, their sharp jags now much more apparent and much more threatening.



THE FOG SURROUNDING them was all-encompassing, a dense mass that soaked through you and seemed like it had no beginning or end. Nette's jacket, tough enough to keep her dry in Audria's frequent rainstorms, was useless in the bone-biting fog. Visibility wasn't as bad as they had feared, but Brier still kept the *Marigold* running as slow as she could. The silent stone molars around them cast shadows that cut through the light, turning their surroundings from a formless white to swathes of black and grey. Their pursuers were nowhere to be seen.

"I knew they were too chicken to come after us in here." Nette crowed. "We're practically home free."

"We still have to make our way through the Teeth." Kayla pointed out.

"Aye, and I'd prefer some quiet so I can focus on what I'm doing." Brier said, her gaze unwavering from their course.

"Come on, guys. At least we don't have to worry about the *Asshole* anymore. That's like, half our worries done away with right there."

“Nette, please just be quiet for a minute.” Brier insisted.

Nette, too proud of herself, wasn’t going to be ignored.

“What are we going to do when we reach the Colleges?” She turned to Kayla instead, “Are you going to be leaving us behind to hang with your much fancier saviors?”

“Nette!” Brier turned to glower at her sister. “Don’t be rude.”

“It’s an honest question! I don’t want to lose recognition just because we’re some junkers nobody cares about.”

“Just because you’re so proud of that stunt you pulled doesn’t mean we should preen for attention.” Brier poked Nette in the forehead.

“My *stunt*? I scared them off our backs.”

“You’re lucky they didn’t open fire on us then and there.”

“Captain, should you not...?” Kayla interrupted, her voice very small.

“There’s no way they could have hit us. And now we don’t have nothing to worry about.”

“You’re not thinking! What if you’d—”

“Captain!” Kayla shouted.

The sisters both turned as one to the bow of the *Marigold*, where Kayla was pointing at a particularly large floating spire the airship was heading towards.

“Oh... *shit*.” Nette muttered as Brier grabbed the wheel, whipping it to starboard.

The *Marigold*’s busted engine groaned as the propellers reversed, the old airship doing its best to turn. Kayla stood up, holding onto the railing. The heir looked like she wanted to help, but she wasn’t sure what she could do. The *Marigold* was at the canine rock, just barely turned away from it, and Nette almost breathed a sigh of relief before—

SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

The port side of the *Marigold* tore as it scraped against the pillar, a wrenching sound that was far worse than anything Nette had ever heard. Brier’s mouth moved in the shape of a particularly offensive word, but Nette couldn’t hear her over the noise.

Finally, the airship slowed to a halt, her three passengers finding themselves stopped in a clearing between pillars. Nette leaned against

the bridge's railing with her good arm, struggling to control her breathing.

"Are we alive?" She asked.

"Yes, but is the *Marigold*?" Brier responded, her own breath just as ragged. She locked the ship's throttle and rushed to the port side of the *Marigold*, "I'll need to get down and check it out." She moved to climb over the side of the ship, but Nette stopped her.

"Aliha, I'll do it." She said.

"But..." Brier gestured at Nette's arm, still wrapped in a makeshift cast.

"I'm healing."

Brier shook her head.

"And we both know I'm better at running the rigging than you, even with my arm like this."

"You're not going to be able to."

"Look, I'll just check it out. If we need to do any emergency repairs, I'll call you down."

Brier sighed and looked over at Kayla for assistance. The heir had collapsed back into her seat with her hand over her chest. "I don't like it," said Brier, "If you"

Nette swung herself over the rail of the *Marigold*. "I'll be fine." She insisted. Then she began the climb down.

The *Marigold* had a rigging running across the sides of it, and Nette had memorized both the ropes and the metal hand, and foot holds chunked into the side. As she approached the gash, the holds were warped, and the ropes were torn. Pain shot through her left shoulder with every movement, and her good arm was starting to get sore. She'd been running the rigging since she was little, though. She could soldier through it.

"Okay, let's see..." Nette muttered, and shortly after her sister's head poked over the side of the ship.

"How bad is it?"

Nette climbed closer to the scratch. "Looks like the hull's still holding." She pulled herself across, holding onto the top of the gash. "Seems like it's just a scratch."

"All right." Brier disappeared again. "Come back up."

Nette nodded to herself and surveyed the rigging, planning her

next move. She'd need to move down to the unbroken ropes, and then go back around and up to the deck. As she began her climb, something dull and blue that should not have been sitting on the rim of the gash caught her eye. "Uh. Aliha?" The *Marigold* lurched downwards, throwing Nette's balance off for one too many seconds and she yelped.

"What was that?"

"The Antithum—*nnngh*—it's out of whack. Our balance is all screwed up!" Nette shouted as fast as she could. The airship started slowly sinking further down, and she held on as hard as she could.

"... stay where you are!" She barely heard her sister as the *Marigold's* hull groaned.

"What?" She clung onto her handhold, her shoulder screaming at her as the airship tilted further down. She'd been on the rigging more than enough times to not be afraid of the water below her, but with all the fog she couldn't be sure if anything *was* below. She swallowed and adjusted her grip. Above her, she heard running, and her sister's voice yelling words she didn't comprehend. She looked up, trying to think of a way out, when she noticed movement. The Antithum had been dislodged from its couplings and was slowly rolling towards the edge of the *Marigold*. Nette groaned. She started to climb higher, trying to get above the gash before the rock was lost.

The rock that kept the *Marigold* afloat shuddered on the corner of the gash

Nette kept her eyes on it.

It rolled over once more, and faster than a blink, it leaped into the air like a small stone bird.

Throwing her upper body towards it, she reached, arm outstretched

Nette felt the small rock land in her palm, felt a surge of triumph, and felt gravity start to take hold. She tried to grab back onto the hull, but the upward pull from the Antithum was throwing her off balance. She felt herself falling away from the *Marigold*, and the rock strained against her sweaty fingers. A thought crossed her mind—regret? She barely had time to process it before another jolt of pain shot through her and a hand grabbed her shoulder.

"Ow. OW. What—"

Nette looked up at her savior and realized that it wasn't her sister who had grabbed her.

"Oh dear," said the crown princess of Audria, "I didn't—I thought—"

"Kayla?" Nette tried to process through the pain, "but you're..."

"Shh," said Kayla, shifting so Nette's arm was wrapped around her shoulder. Nette, stabilized, shoved the Antithum back into its socket where it *clicked*.

Captain Brier helped hoist Nette back onto the deck, and Kayla clambered over the railing after her. As the *Marigold* began to reorient itself, Brier hugged her sister close.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry." Nette mumbled into her sister's shoulder.

"You're too damn lucky for your own good." Brier muttered back.

"I'll come right back next time, I'm sorry."

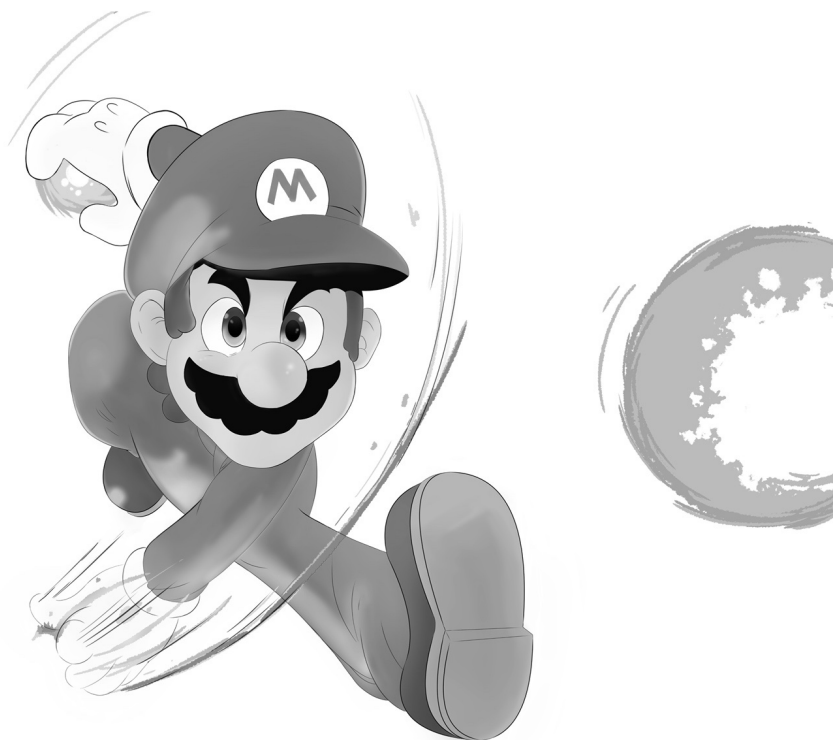
"As long as you're safe, Little Crow."

Helen Solano

A Multiplayer Game

Nintendo—
selling video games, destroying friendships.
Forming a group of 4 or more players.
A whole lot of trash talk,
no action.
Until the TV turns on.
“Let’s play a game of Mario Party.”
Have they lost their minds?
Pretty much.
Let’s roll the dice.
As each of us has a turn,
grabs an item,
a mini game begins.
It’s win or lose.
Grab those coins,
earn a star
—despite the distance.
Go ahead and act petty.
We won’t move the star...
or steal it...
Not ’til it’s game over.
Winning first place,
with the most stars, is success.
Even having more coins,
feels like being rich.
“Mario Kart now?”
Race through a course of 200cc,
securing first place, scoring a victory.
No blue shell would slow me down.
“Okay, let’s settle this in Super Smash Bros!”

Yelling like children across the room,
three stocks, no items—
it's a brawl till the last man standing wins.



5.

SPOOKY SPIRAL STAIRCASE is a spooky spiral staircase. According to everything you know about how these sorts of things work, you're going to have the best shot finding a ghost of *any* sort up there. You point your flashlight up them, trying to see what's up there, but from your angle you find it hard to make anything out.

You test the first couple of stairs with your foot. The staircase is made out of metal, and although they are dusty the steps show no sign of collapsing. You start up, admiring the way that the railings have vines and roses etched into them. You come up to a second floor, and look around. You're in a plain hallway, just as still as the entrance below. The staircase continues up, and you decide that you're going to keep following it. You realize as you go up that you're in some kind of tower, and windows against the wall look out at the rest of the grand manor. Eventually, you step off the staircase into what must be the highest point in the whole manor.

You sweep your flashlight across the room you've arrived in. Moonlight streams in through the tower windows, so the flashlight isn't altogether necessary. You keep it on for effect, though. The lights illuminate the room you're in, which you intuit from the smallish bed, bright pink and green paint on the walls, and the intricately crafted dollhouse in the corner, is a child's bedroom. Not only that, but the creepy dolls on the bureau, a lonely rocking chair in the corner, the long-extinguished chandelier gently swaying overhead...

This is the *perfect* place to find a ghost.

A painted sign on the front of the bed tells you that it belongs to "Mavis"

- *Try to contact her—11*

Meg McDonald
Phoenix Dreams

Many dreams burst forth from my mind.
Brilliant and winged, they dance,
new stars in the silent dusk,
shedding firework feathers like rain.
They trace the paths of love,
alighting gently on each heart close to mine.
At last they soar beyond the sky,
beholding all at once
the miracle of existence,
the beauty of the heavens and earth.
My soul is ablaze with wonder.

6.

THE HISTORY of Deadman's Pier is a very spooky story. To tell it all would be a long, terrible tale, and the thought makes you shiver. So you create a condensed version.

"It was a dark and stormy night, a man sailing found the pier and hid a very secret treasure, and then died a mysterious death, his body was never discovered. It is said , he roams the depths of the water, haunting the pier to protect his big glorious treasure, which no one has lived to tell the tale, except for the one person who lived to tell the tale."

.....

Now that you've said it all out loud, it kind of sounds like a bit hokey. Maybe you should just go home.

THE END.

Thomas Desmond

Fate in Flames

MATTEN SAT in his office waiting for his regular visit from Adam Wilmer. The two had known each other for quite some time now, but never well enough. He lit a match and held it to the end of his Highclere Castle cigar. As he took the first puff, he was reminded of why these were his absolute favorite. In silence, he tossed the matches back on his desk and wondered why he couldn't get on the same page as Adam. Why they couldn't work things out.

Knowing his patient was on the way, Matten hesitated lighting the match at all, knowing how sensitive his patient was to that sort of thing. However, he just could not resist. His nerves needed to be wrung out from the pounding anxiety of his forward-thinking brain. This was his way of doing it. Even if the cigar only burned for mere seconds, the stressful anticipation of what was to come was just too much to bear organically. When Adam entered minutes later, Matten quickly and wistfully put out the cigar and hid it as he prepared for what was sure to be another chapter in their difficult discourse.

"Adam, welcome back. Please have seat" Matten said politely.

Adam inched into the immaculately kept office and sat down in the marron padded yet somehow uncomfortable chair. Annoyed, he began almost immediately.

"Why am I here again Matten?" Adam questioned. "We both know this is pointless. I have bigger things to deal with."

"I know what you want to do Adam, I do," Matten acknowledged. "That's why we're here. To talk about it."

"You're gonna let me do it?" Adam asked with some excitement as a glimmer of hope flashing in his darken sunken eyes.

"No, Adam it's not going to happen," Matten said defiantly. "But what I do want you to do is tell me the story again. The whole story."

"We've been through it a million times already," Adam complained. "It's pointless. There's nothing we can do."

"You're right, we have. But frankly, I'm having a lot of trouble trying to figure this out. So give me every detail you can remember. Every last one," Matten said. "I want to help you Adam, and if that means listening to the same story a million times more I will."

Adam was over it. He felt trapped. Contained. He just wanted to move on and do what he had to do. Thinking about it, Adam observed everything around him. Every boxed memory on the walls. The shagged rug pinned down beneath his feet. The dusty books on the shelf sitting as they aged unopened and unable to fulfill their purpose. The messy desk in front of him with scattered papers covering a barely used calendar. Potential yet again wasted. Colored pens stacked in a souvenir glass. An opened box of long burned matches resting amongst the rubble. He noticed it all. He noted it.

"Convince me," Matten said as he sat up in his chair.

"Fine," Adam said reluctantly, "but this will be the last time, I promise you that." Adam began his story.



I had the day off from work and no classes. The shift was overstaffed, and they called to let me know they didn't need me. At first, I was upset. I needed the money and had already cleared my day of any plans anticipating the eight-hour block. But that ended up being only one of two phone calls that day, which led me to believe it was a blessing in disguise.

My brother, Christian, was in the 1st grade at the time. He was 8 years old, had just started playing baseball, and was leaving kindergarten. The adjustment hadn't been easy for him. From what my parents had told me, he was having strange dreams and trouble making friends.

However, up until then nothing too strange had ever happened. Nothing to grow concerned over.

Were you two close?

We were pretty close. We joked around a lot and played games, as

normal brothers would. I tried to set a good example for him, but in terms of being close on an emotional level, he wasn't really old enough for us to connect to each other that way just yet.

Anyways, I got a call from my mom who knew I was out of work. She told me Christian's principal had called and asked for someone to come pick him up. He got in trouble for pushing one of his classmates and became hysterical in denying it. So rather than send him back to class, they figured they would send him home early.

"Can you run down there and pick him up?" my mom said. "I can't get out of work till four."

Did you have a problem with that?

No, I was fine with it. Not only did I have nothing better to do, but what was I supposed to tell my mother? No?

I jumped in the car, drove over, and met with the principal. We spoke in private at first. She told me that Christian's classmate, Peter, was pushed down at recess and the carnage was obvious. Pushed from behind, Peter didn't see who did it as he was surrounded by a decent

number of classmates. So, when he came crying to their teacher Ms. Jackson telling her what happened and showing her the injuries, she knew exactly who to look towards.

As Ms. Jackson told it, prior to recess Christian had just woken up from an "unwelcome" in-class nap and the first thing he did was come over and start telling her about a dream he had. They all had to do with his "classmate" who "fell and got hurt during recess." Everything Christian said to her matched up perfectly with what happened to Peter. Every last detail. So when it all happened and the culprit was unknown, she decided Christian planned the whole thing as some kind of game and sent him straight to the principal's office.

Did you believe it?

I didn't. Like I said before, Christian had been having random dreams. I figured maybe this was just one of those times and a

strange set of coincidences followed. I thought it was pretty silly for them to just jump to the conclusion that he was responsible.

When he was taken to the principal's office, Christian denied everything, and the longer he went on the more the blubbing boiled. He tried to explain that he wasn't talking about Peter to Ms. Jackson. "It was just a dream," he cried, "from when I took my nap. That's all it was." The principal chalked it up to an imaginative excuse covering a cry for attention from an innocent child and let him talk it out, before calling my mom.

In forcing myself to act like an adult and be fair, I recognized that his dreams were never THIS violent. They were mostly scary or just weird. He easily could have been lying, I mean I constantly lied at that age.

Either way, I told the principal I would let my parents know and took Christian to the car. I didn't say anything negative to him then. He looked sad, tired and angry and I was by no means an authority figure. I choose to stay out of it and just let my parents take care of the reprimanding. Unfortunately, that choice did not end up being mine to make.

Christian fell asleep in the backseat of the car on the way home. I felt bad for him and assumed he was tired from all the waterworks. It was a tough situation he was in.

And what was that?

Going through the motions with no one to talk to and no one to play with. It feels like an endless cycle of loneliness where you know that it wasn't something that could get fixed in a day. I had been through something very similar, not to long before. In thinking about all of this while driving, I was shocked to hear the surprising voice pop out of the backseat.

"I just had the weirdest dream" Christian said randomly. I hadn't even heard him wake up.

"Another one? What was it this time?" I said to avoid ignoring him.

"You were in a fire" he responded.

What run through your mind right then?

Honestly, I chuckled a little bit. I didn't know what else to say or do. It had caught me so off guard in so many different ways. I just laughed and tried to answer him.

"Christian what the hell does that mean?" I chuckled. He was silent for a minute. "I think you died," he answered.

"Enough, Christian," I said. I tried to change the topic. "Save this for mom and dad. Please."

"It happened after mom lost the keys, and dad's car broke down," he immediately replied. I tried to chime in with, "You're starting to make me think you did push Peter, Chri—"

"After the homeless man saved the dog from the train," he interrupted, "and the neighbors started yelling at each other."

"Christian..." I said as I tried to stop him.

He kept going. "And then the fire started," he finished as I quickly pulled over. I took a second to breathe before I finally told him to knock it off completely. I yelled at him.

Had you ever yelled at your brother before?

No, not really.

So why then?

He was scaring me. It was all so...specifically detailed. So random. It just felt like it couldn't have come out of nowhere.

"You just had a bad dream. That's it," I said quietly to him as I turned around back in my seat and pulled onto the road. He didn't respond the rest of the way home, and when we pulled into the driveway, he went straight into his room without either of us saying a word and stayed there till my mom got home.

A little time had passed, but nothing had changed. Christian sat in his room waiting to go to practice. I did homework after I had finally gotten over the whole event in the car, although it wasn't forgotten completely.

When my mom I caught her up on everything. The nap, Ms. Jackson, Peter, the principal, all of it and she had pretty much the same reaction as I did. She felt it was kind of ridiculous for them to just blame him off of a dream he had, and she would let the school know that. That being said, she did tell me she would talk to him about it and see if anything was bothering him.

And you didn't tell her about what happened in the car?

No, I didn't.

And why was that?

I felt like I was making a big deal out of something stupid and it was just best to keep it all to myself. Besides, Christian didn't need any more trouble. He was already mad enough at me as it was.

"Where is he?" my mom asked next.

"He's getting ready for practice in his room," I responded. "He's still upset about everything."

"I'll talk to him about it on the way there, we're gonna have to leave in 2 minutes or he's gonna be late," she said as she walked down to his room.

I found it weird that my mom was driving him to practice. I thought my dad was supposed to.

"He's coming right now," she said as she entered the room. "Hey, you haven't seen my house key, have you?"

Is that where you realized a connection?

It didn't hit me because who doesn't lose their keys every once and a while? I just said, "No, I haven't. Why, did you lose it?"

"I thought I had it with me this morning but when I got to work, I couldn't find it. I figured I had just left it on my nightstand, but it wasn't there," she answered.

Where was your father again?

Right. I asked her “How come you’re driving him to practice? I thought dad was supposed to be home in time.”

“Well, he was, but his car broke down in the middle of the highway on his way back. He’s still dealing with the towing guys,” she responded.

Did it hit you then?

It did. I tried not to make a big deal out of it because I used to do that with small things. It was a really bad habit. I could hear the clicks of Christian’s baseball cleats heading closer to us and thought it was best to leave it alone. He walked in with his bag on his back and told my mom he was ready to go. The two headed out towards the door. As he exited, Christian turned back with a strange look I had never seen before. He seemed worried. Sad. Concerned. I noticed then, and that look has been implanted in my memory ever since.

It wasn’t long before my mom quickly popped her head back in for one final message.

“I forgot to mention, the other half of the pizza your father and I had last night is in a box in the oven,” she noted. “If you get hungry you can have it.”

“Where is it from?” I quickly asked.

“*Espressos*, down the street” she added “I’ve got to go I’ll talk to you when I get home.”

I pretended like I was going to eat it, but I was not a fan of *Espressos*. The crust was too thick, and the sauce was all chunky. I planned to improvise and just make something myself later. At that time, I had bigger things to think about.

I spent the next forty minutes doing nothing productive. I attempted to make sense of the fact that my brother had predicted two completely random things out of nowhere and if the trend was to continue things were not looking good at all. I stressed. After everything that happened with Christian at school that morning, I didn’t know what to think. But as I said before, I overreacted to a lot of things and figured this was one of those times. I took some deep breathes and actively sought out a distraction from it all. Finally, it came.

I received a text from my boss saying that a charity event we held at work the day before was supposed to be covered on the 6 o'clock news. I was interviewed by the station for their program, so naturally I got excited. I never usually watched the news on television. It was all too negative for me and caused me to freak about things I was completely disconnected from. But who wouldn't tune in to see themselves on tv in that situation?

In celebration, I decided to make myself one of my favorite dinners, oven cooked honey BBQ chicken tenders. I clicked on the preheat and turned on channel 7 right before it was about to start.

You don't even have to ask because I know what you're thinking. Why would I even touch an oven when I was so worried? I was distracted and I needed to be distracted. Besides, fearing the oven seemed like something I was a bit too old for.

The news finally started. I was sitting on the couch ready to go. I didn't know when, specifically, in the hour-long program the charity event was supposed to show up, so I was just planning on sitting there till it did. But when the first story was covered the blockade barricading my brain from the stress had been torn down completely.

"Welcome to the six o'clock news" said the show's anchor, "I'm your host Cherri Johnson. Let's get right into it. Our first story is a local one. Early this morning, authorities were called to deal with what appeared to be a homeless man endangering himself on subway tracks near 49th street. However, what was later discovered was that forty-seven-year-old Dan Henderson had been on a rescue mission, saving a dog who had been trapped in the tracks and in danger of being seriously injured or worse."

I sat there for a second in disbelief, before I stood up and started pacing. That's what I did when I stressed out about things. I stood up and paced back and forth really fast. I rubbed my hands across my head and talked to myself in a higher pitched voice. That night, I did all of that and more.

I tried to deny it. I told myself that Christian predicted the dog was trapped in train tracks and this was clearly a subway. And that my mom only lost one key not multiple keys. This was important to

me. Anything to give my fears a less justifiable cause. None of it worked.

Just then I heard yelling from the window. My mind began to swirl in an uncontrollable fashion. The neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Daniels, had just burst outside in the midst of a heated argument. I couldn't handle it. My grip was slipping, and I was slowly fading into lunacy.

The yelling continued as I tried to wrangle all the indisputable evidence for my impending death. I was convinced. Christian's dreams weren't just dreams, he was seeing the future. He told me my fate. How I was meant to die. That realization became concrete to me when another grain of sand fell in the ticking hourglass of my sanity.

The beeping of the smoke alarm ensued and silenced the neighbors. I turned towards the smell of ash to see an oven engulfed in flames. The pizza box was still in there and it was foundation of an ever-growing blaze right before my eyes.

That was it. I cracked. I broke down and cried. I couldn't even function enough to fight the fire to the best of my abilities. It was a strange and helpless feeling. I didn't want to die, but it didn't seem like I had a choice. The smoke got worse. I continued to fight it, but I was losing. My consciousness began to drift. My flooded eye sockets began to close. It was all happening so fast, until nothing happened at all, and I fell into a trench of twilight. To a place where even the massive apricot colored illuminations could not prevent a complete blackout. I was gone.



“AND HOW DID you survive again Adam?” The doctor said as he nodded. Adam's long story was finally over and Dr. Matten looked as he usually did.

“Ms. Jackson pulled me out, while Mr. Jackson fought the fire as best as he could and called 911” Adam responded, sensing the same reaction from the doctor that he had always given him. He knew this was pointless.

"Has Christian had any more visions of the 'future' since?" the doctor asked. "No," Adam said quietly, knowing where this was going.

"Doesn't that mean anything to you? Doesn't that prove that this is something less of a threat and more of a psychological issue?" Matten asked.

"I've thought about all of this before," Adam replied. "He hasn't had another one since because the last one hasn't run its course. Once I'm gone, they will start again. I just know it."

"You don't know," Matten responded as he sighed. "Even if that was true Adam, why not just leave it be? Why do you want the visions to continue?"

"The lag is destroying him, Doctor" Adam replied emotionally. "He told me that. He said he was scared. In pain and confused. Hurt."

Dr. Matten fell silent. Adam could sense the skepticism in every movement he made. Every facial twitch spout doubt. All of his body movements indicated a feeling of discomfort.

"Doctor, listen to me. I should have died that day. I know what my brother saw is meant to happen. Everything else did, I know it's coming." Adam said to silence "You have to believe me. Every day since, I've lived waiting for it. I've tried to cope. I've done everything you told me to, I do everything I can, even though I know nothing can stop it. Can you imagine that??? Can you imagine living a life in constant fear of inevitable and imminent death??? I can't do it anymore. I don't need psychological examination. I don't need all of these meetings and group therapy sessions," Adam monologued as he began to tear up. "There's nothing anyone can do to stop it. So just let me go. Let me give in."

"You're sick Adam," Dr. Matten said sympathetically as he stood up and walked towards the door. He called for nurses and left the entrance cracked open. Adam dropped his head down. Tears flowing, he knew what was coming. "It's been two years since the fire. If your fate was to die that day, I'm sure it would have caught up to you by now, don't you think?" the doctor said. "For two years you've been doing this. It's unfair to both you and the people who love you. Your poor brother thinks he drove you insane, Adam. That's what hurts him. That's why he is confused. What does that mean to you? How do you think that will suit him going forward?"

Adam shook his head in disagreement. "I told him it's not his fault. He was just the messenger," Adam said sobbing. "Something bigger is inside of him."

"Listen to yourself," Matten said in growing aggravation. "I just called some nurses to bring you back to your room."

"No," Adam quickly denied, "nothing can help me. Doctor just let me do it."

"You are going to have to go back there until we meet again soon," Matten said as if he hadn't even heard.

"No, please, doctor!" Adam began to scream in frustration. "Please I don't want to go back."

I can't take it anymore! I can't do it! It's coming for me, it wants me! I have to give in to fate!"

Two nurses entered the room. Adam flopped right onto the doctor's desk in hysterical fashion, doing whatever he could not to be thrown back in his self-entitled lockbox.

"Please, no!" he screamed "It will happen either way! There's nothing we can do to stop it! Please!"

The two nurses pulled the sobbing patient off of the desk and towards the door. He continued his pleading.

"No. No. No. No," he said as he continued to sob. "let fate do its job. Please. PLEASE DOCTOR. IT WILL ONLY GET WORSE!"

Matten continued to ignore Adam as he was dragged out of the office and back down the hall to his holding cell. The screams filled the heavily tinkered head that held a Ph.D, which was meant to deal with this kind of thing. Yet, time goes on and he continues to have no clue how to help.

With Adam giving them no choice in his physical fit of rage and worry, the nurses were forced to throw him straight into the pillow padded square that he called hell and slam the door behind him.

On the ground, he laid there crying. He had been through too much. He wanted to give in and free himself from what he believed was his known fate. Yet slowly, his cries turned into laughs. He cackled as he sat up with his back against the wall. Tears still fresh on the bay of his cheeks, Adam slid a small box of Dr. Matten's matches out from the sleeve of his turquoise, numbered uniform. His laughs grew quieter

as he scratched the tomato colored tip of the long burn match, the same ones from the desk, smoothly across the rough surface of the damaged cardboard. Quickly, his smiles turned to a look of relief as he was ready to release himself of the weight he bore. His cold, dead soul was brightened as the trail of marigold crept up his sleeve.

7.

“YEAH, FINE.” You tell her, and go back to packing up your gear. You’re not bringing all that much, you’re just going downstairs after all, but you’d hate to miss out on anything because you’re lazy. Along with your handy flashlight and a water bottle full of Kool-Aid, you’re bringing a fun new device called a spirit box with you. You’re very excited for that.

The pair of you go downstairs around ten at night. You had wanted to go later, but she says she has to go to work tomorrow. Down in the basement, the two of you quickly separate to opposite sides of the dark room.

“This is stupid.” She says, flipping the lightswitch on and off. Nothing happens, the lights must be broken.

You toss her the flashlight. “We’ve been down here for a minute. Be patient.”

You take out the spirit box, careful not to break it, and flip the dial on the side to ON. The first thing that you notice is that it’s loud. The box works by rapidly flipping through different radio stations (of which most are static), and it allows the supernatural to communicate through the static. When they aren’t communicating, though, it just sounds like a buffet of static interspersed with random gibberish.

“Look—events—find—Gh—” says the spirit box.

“I can’t believe you’re making me do this.” Says your roommate.

“Beware—”

“Come on, can’t you just be quiet and listen?” You retort.

“Behind—you”

“I can’t hear *anything* over that hunk of garbage.”

“Shh! I think it’s—”

“Gotcha.” Says the spirit box, and the static falls away until you can’t hear it anymore. Actually, as your roommate’s mouth moves, you realize you can’t hear anything.

- *That’s not good—12*

8.

THIS IS STARTING to get a bit weird, isn't it? You're excited, this is what you've been looking for your entire life. The way everything is starting to rattle and thwump around is starting to unnerve you, though. Slowly, you back away from the bed. Not a moment too soon, it would turn out, as the shutters on the windows slam open from a sudden, piercing gust of wind, and the chandelier's already worn down chain snaps and comes tumbling down exactly where you were just standing.

The child's giggling echoes through the bedroom, and you decide that you've had enough. You bolt towards the staircase as a glowing figure begins to materialize above the bed. You don't even stop to look, though, you just want to get out. You sprint—dangerously enough that your mom would have given you a stern lecture—down the spiral stairs. The ghost's laughter follows you all the way down, and as you pass by the second floor landing you see doors flying open, the rooms beyond filled with spectral visages that laugh and moan. You pay them no mind. Rounding the last curve, you stumble out into the main hall. Above you, sinking through the ceiling, are dozens of ghosts of various shapes and sizes.

Ahead, one of the suits of armor springs to life, but you're already running to the front door. It swings a metal fist at you, and you duck, putting your hands over your head to guard. It swings again, and you scramble forward to grab the handle. For a single, heartstopping second, it doesn't turn. But then it does, and you fall flat onto your face, the hard wood of the outside patio stopping your ungraceful fall.

Shaken, you look back up at the doorway, expecting to see a steel attacker, or worse, come rushing through it. However, it just swings shut silently, and as it closes you hear the *click* of a lock being turned.

You never do tell anyone what happened at the Jeffers' mansion. But when it is proposed that that area of woodland be paved over and built into a suburban neighborhood, you're one of the first people to vote "YES" on the ballot.

You hear that more than a few tragedies befall the construction workers. But by the time that happens, you've moved to California.

. . .

THE END.

9.

YOU CROUCH down on the rickety dock. The water, reflecting the darkened night, it's still gross looking. You take your hand reluctantly and splash the water back and forth.... Still nothing.

- *Recall the history of this place—6*

Callie Gonsalves

Sepia Tones

there are lullabies in the smells of coffee and chlorine,
a shuffling deck of cards singing to the beat produced by
 running barefoot in the street.
our voices are electric, and we scream so loud that we shatter
 the sky
and the dewdrops in your eyes dance around the fire.
flower petals kiss our lips and root themselves deep in our souls
but it's okay: we've always been wild.
we've always been the ones to cry in the sun and dance in the
 thunder,
the ones with tangled hair and dirty feet.
with you, wild was always more like home.
even on the days that our hearts are heavy enough
to break the branches of the trees we climb,
we trust that the clouds can catch us.

Morgan Collins

Tabanidae

A horsefly flew into her mouth and she didn't even
scream. She just held still, with her lips pursed in a perfect 'O',
her teeth a bottleneck into another world inside
her body. A world where each finger considered itself
an entire limb, where her throat formed a square, where her
words
demanded their vertices. The horsefly had been there once
before, its humming wings a familiar freight train in her ears.
She wasn't reckless,
but knowing, of how to hold completely stagnant, of when
a horsefly bites, of why. *It needs just enough of my blood,*
she knew, to garner enough energy to birth
the next generation of insects who would sew themselves
into the sofa cushions to hide, endure, and wait, to
train for survival and take for provision.

Katie Kawachi

Moonchild

THE SLIMY FEELING would never go away. Gerta had accepted this long ago. No matter how vigorously she scrubbed herself in the wash-basin out back, no matter how much salve she rubbed on the sores that occasionally broke out on her. She sometimes dreaded the thought that dealing with corpses and death would be her life's work, as it was her late father's. The difference between them, she thought, was that she handled it with a sense of respect. She didn't miss him much. He had been a gravedigger, an occupation passed down through generations as if it was a curse. His wife came from a reputed lineage of criminals and lowlives; they married for convenience and not much else, and her brand of "spiritualism" didn't bother him. When he wasn't working, he was a lost, empty man who left the child-rearing to his wife. Gerta, in spite of the curse she was born with, came up a healthy child, not emaciated or sickly like the other luckless children in the village. Though he noticed when his wife began to tutor her in her beliefs, he had been more or less indifferent, or so it seemed. But early one sunless winter morning he'd had an urge, a strange, dark urge that drove him down into the graveyard field. Gerta watched him leave through the window.

Everyone in the village was still fast asleep and he was all alone. Almost every plot of land here had a body lying underneath, and he'd buried many of them himself. He chose his spot and rammed his shovel into the frozen ground with all the force needed. After a couple tries, the soil gave way, then the act of digging became much easier. When he finally struck a hard surface several feet down, it was almost dawn. It was only a thin, flimsy cover; he knew the wood used in building these coffins was very weak. He took a pause to catch his breath and wipe sweat. He knew there was no returning to the dark world that his wife had brought their young daughter into. He knew as well that she herself would probably condemn his actions. But the temptation was so strong and unexplainable. To see the body, whether

it had rotted away into a skeleton. It only took two strikes of the spade to break through the coffin.

This was a transgression so flagrant that it awakened the spirits of the land. He hadn't performed any of the purification rites or shown even the slightest respect for the slumber of the dead. They quickly decided that this arrogant soul belonged to them now. No living soul was there to witness it when the figure of a decaying corpse rose from the earth and dragged Gerta's father down with it. His wife and daughter would never see him again. But when they stumbled upon his shovel in the great field, alongside the open grave with a damaged coffin inside, they could easily infer what had transpired. Gerta's mother had only shaken her head, ignoring her daughter's tears. "Stupid, stupid fool," was all she said. Several years had passed since then and the townsfolk's suspicions of the two women had faded as more interesting occurrences and town gossip captured their attention. The older woman was an aging recluse who made bottled herbal medicines and remedies that she sold at town fairs. When her husband disappeared, most people assumed she must have had some role in it, but they were both untouchable, so what did it matter? People whose livelihood depended on death itself were rarely mourned when they passed. The woman's teenage daughter was a mysterious creature who was known to venture outside occasionally, but only after the sun set. People said she had these flat eyes that reflected no light and saw straight through you. The townsfolk shunned them both. The only friends they had were each other. Even the shack they lived in seemed to have an aura about it that made passersby feel as if they were being watched.

Winter was at its peak. How eagerly Gerta anticipated this point during the rest of the year, when the sun conceded its defeat and slipped away in the early afternoon, plunging the world into a long, continuous darkness. Evening, morning and night blurred together, punctuated by only a few short hours of watery light at midday. Most people kept themselves cloistered in their houses during this time, candle lights blazing through the windows, but not Gerta. She was finally free to explore the wild world that lay outside her house. So happy not to be locked up in that stifling, musty back room with her mother, slaving over some recipe or setting up yet another elaborate

ritual. Today she decided to visit her favorite place, the great coniferous forest that lay just outside the village. Her mother wasn't coming with her; this was the leisure time they took in preparation for Yule. Sometimes they ventured out together by night to search for animal parts, herbs and other special ingredients. Birds, foxes, lynx, and the occasional elk—these were just some of the once-living things that they had taken for themselves. If you took them for the purpose of healing, and more importantly if you paid all the proper respects, the spirits would forgive it—those were her mother's words. Well, Gerta hoped that she wouldn't have to touch or handle any dead animals today, because truthfully, she disliked that part most of all. She shuddered as some of the cold air seeped under her fox pelt, making her skin tingle. The path to the forest wound its way down a steep, rugged hillside, and Gerta had to be careful not to lose her footing in the darkness. Then she had to cross the field where souls rested. She marveled at how pretty the fresh snow looked under the glow of the moon, shimmering like bits of broken glass. There was even a faint trace of those green lights in the air, which set her heart aflutter. Maybe one of them was her father.

The forest was eerily silent in the deep winter. It seemed barren, lifeless even, but Gerta knew that wasn't so. The earth spirits may be drowsy, but they are still watching. She seated herself under a sapling. An owl hooted in the distance. Gerta rubbed her numbing palms together and took out some biscuits wrapped in cloth. She ate the biscuits quietly, stared at the sky, and daydreamed about transforming into a wise owl, a timid fox, or a soaring eagle. One day, maybe once she was wise and experienced enough. She took the art too lightly, her mother was always saying. Trust the spirits that inhabit the trees and the water and the earth; always respect them because without them, life wouldn't exist. I might not always be here, Gerta. Soon you'll be a woman, you'll have children of your own and you will have to teach them.

Gerta could hardly imagine what life would be like without her mother. She hadn't cast Gerta out into the forest because of her condition, the way some mothers might have. She shielded her from the villagers. The distrust with which they regarded the women could easily erupt into something more violent, Gerta sensed. And she would

make an easy target, simply because sunlight made her burn, peel, and break out in painful hives. They'd use that as "proof" of her inner evil, this living embodiment of cursed darkness. And Gerta and her mother were among the few in their village who hadn't yet converted to the spiritual beliefs from overseas. Her mother found them strange and nonsensical, so Gerta did too.

A downpour had started while Gerta was immersed in thought. She cursed and sprang to her feet, realizing her fur pelt was going to get soaked. She wrapped it tightly around her body and rushed back to the village. The wind was in a fierce mood. It howled and whipped and lashed at her exposed skin like a caged animal. She scrambled her way up the hill, which seemed steeper than ever. It was a long walk across town before Gerta threw open the door and stepped inside the house, safe at last. She shrugged off the drenched pelt and hung it up beside the window. Her mother was in the back room as always, sitting and reading one of her tomes beside a lit candle.

"Storm's really something, isn't it Ma?"

"Mmm," her mother agreed, barely listening. She nodded towards a pot on the table. "I made some rowanberry tea, it might help heat you up."

Gerta thanked her and poured herself a cup, then sat down across from her mother. The fragrant aroma of pine sprigs decorating the walls wafted towards her. Yuletide was approaching, and they had both prepared what Gerta thought might be their best offering yet. Roasted nuts, chicken, smoked fish, and delicious root vegetables cooked in goose fat, a delicious banquet that tempted Gerta every time she went down to the root cellar. Soon, the two of them would head out to the field at the crack of dawn, awaiting the arrival of the sun. Gerta didn't revere the sun, despite partaking in the tradition out of a sense of duty. In many ways, she hated it. To her it was a destroyer; a scorching, searing, awful ball of fire which birthed all life into existence, nursed them like its own children, only to curse Gerta on a whim with paper skin. Nonetheless, Gerta recognized the importance of appeasing the spirits, earning their full protection and favor. They may have already saved your life without you even knowing it, her mother said.

Yule was always a lonely affair. Just Gerta and her mother, gathered alone in that sprawling field flanked by the pine forest. They were

dressed for the occasion, but not too festively. Her mother seemed to treat it as a solemn thing rather than a celebration. It was still dark, a long while before the crown of the sun would peek out over the heads of the trees. The moon was their companion for now.

Gerta's mother set down their offering on the ground and kneeled. Gerta kneeled too. The two of them joined hands and began to sing the same melodies they sang every Yule, passed down from mother to mother, probably since the beginning of time. Gerta thought about wolves and owls and other creatures of the night. How smoothly they seemed to meld together, changing from one form to another in her mind. She thanked them for offering their bones, fur and talons as a gateway to the spirit world, the sacrifices that required no blood to be shed.

Flashes of bright light forced her eyelids open. Had the sun already started its fleeting journey across the sky?

Gerta's mother caught on faster than she did. She gripped her daughter tightly, a feral look suddenly transforming her features. Gerta realized that it was still dark, and the lights were from the far end of the field. It was torches, blindingly bright. A group of men whom she couldn't see, but she could hear them hollering and whooping, drawing ever closer. Her mother's fingers were becoming claws, digging into her skin.

Then the earth began to shake violently. Gerta couldn't believe her eyes when she saw it under the ghostly moonlight. A deep black chasm was splitting the ground before them, getting wider and wider by the second. She saw the torches stop in their tracks.

Her mother yelled, "Run!" and shoved her in the direction of the woods. She didn't need to be told twice; she ran, nimble and fast as one could be in fur boots. She weaved in and out between pine trees and didn't stop to catch her breath, even when her lungs begged her to. Only when she could see a dirt road through the trees did she finally stop, doubling over with a gasp. Oh, she was thirsty. She closed her eyes for a second; upon opening them, her mother was right there. She started at the sudden sight of her, but she was relieved. "What are we going to do, Ma?"

They continued walking parallel to the road, wary of being spotted. The sun was out in full force by the time they emerged from the

forest, having reached the next town over. "There's a seaport here," her mother said. "We'll board the next ship. Doesn't matter where it's going."

On top of her festive dress, Gerta was also wearing a seal fur coat, draped in such a way that it covered as much of her from the sun as it could. She could still feel her skin itch and peel. She and her mother stuck to the narrow side streets and alleyways, still uncertain of how far the word had spread. The seaport was a very crowded, loud, uncomfortable place. There was only one ship and wherever it was headed was a popular destination. Where could it be?

As they boarded, Gerta overheard snippets of conversation—"a new world where you can start with a clean slate," "endless opportunities," "it must be an improvement from life here, at least." She thought, Surely we must be invisible in this sea of people. Safe, wherever we're going. As painful as it is to leave our old life behind. She caught her mother's eye and they exchanged weak, sad smiles.

Meg McDonald

A Leaf Is a Map of the World

River-veins fork and meld.
Green patches cluster near their shallow banks,
Blank brown dust beyond.
I found it in my path one day,
Broad and flat, newly fallen from grace.
I picked it up, spun the wide stem in my fingers.
It came home with me, by habit perhaps,
Something to fiddle with, to admire.
Slowly, over days, it curled and wizened,
Cut off from its source, unable to adapt,
Parchment withering in the bitter indoors.
Green parched to a yellower brown, then returned as mold.
Holes developed in its fragile flesh,
Black freckles bruised its skin.
The imperfect map crumbles
As all things do, knowledge and life alike,
Living on only in memory.

Nikki Pietrocola

From Salt to Sugar

To whomever is at war (with the world, with a loved one, with
yourself),

There was a time where my whole body was an open wound,
and the ground I walked on,
crunched like sea salt.

Burning through the pain, at the time, but eventually revealing
something new about
myself.

That year I realized that I come in layers.
And even though no one has hit my core;
you have come pretty damn close to it, (the closest to it).

You watched carefully, as my salt turned to sugar,
my disbelief to belief.

I realized then,
from you,
that not all people on this earth are ill intentioned.

If there is anything you can take from this, do not let the ill-
intentioned or pain take away your softness.
Because once it is gone, it is almost impossible to get back.

From a heart of gold, to another
Change your salt to sugar.

10.

It's past eight when your small car pulls into the end of the dirt road that is the Jeffers Mansion. From your research, the Jeffers Mansion (long since abandoned in the middle of the woods) boasts one of the highest ghost-per-square-meter rates in the county. People generally chalk it up to it being old and generally in disrepair, but as you step out of your car and turn on your flashlight, the mansion looms ahead of you, tall and strong. The Jeffers family was a strange one, and after a string of tragic deaths (two daughters, a butler, the father, the detective investigating supposed murders, and the insurance agent trying to figure out what the hell had happened), the house was quickly abandoned. Perfect place to find at least *some* supernatural activity. You step up to the door, and flick on your flashlight.

The door creaks open, appropriately enough. You step through it into a long entrance hallway, lined with closed doors. You drag your flashlight across the room, noting the thick layer of dust covering the carpet, the matching suits of armor guarding the front door, all the doorknobs, and the light fixtures. In the middle of the hallway is a tight spiral staircase, leading up to the next floor.

This place is perfect.

You creep up to the first doorway, curious. It creaks open (though not quite as impressive as the front door), leading to another staircase that leads down into an even inkier blackness. You aren't finding any ghosts on this floor, nothing ever happens on the first floor. Seems you've got a choice here.

- *Go up the spiral stairs—5*
- *Go down into the darkness—17*

11.

“MAVIS?” You call out. Nothing responds except for the creak of the wind under the floorboards. At least, that’s what you assume that creaking is. The bedroom sits still, and you look it over again. Everything seems to indicate the presence of *something* spooky, and yet...

“Is Mavis present?” You ask again. Something shifts in your corner, and you turn to face it.

“Hello?”

The child-sized rocking chair is slowly tilting forward, like someone’s pushing it. You take a single step forward, and whatever is holding it drops. The chair rocks back, and forth, and you watch it with intense fascination.

Someone—or *something*—giggles behind you.

You whirl again, looking for the source, but the only offender is those spooky dolls. One—a Raggedy Ann type of doll, but with a black dress and no hair—shifts a little. You watch as its head lolls down, the stitches straining to keep it on.

You slowly slide your phone out of your pocket. You just got a sweet camera upgrade, and it seems like something is definitely going on.

“Who’s there?” You ask, while subtly opening your camera app.

That giggling again, louder this time. You turn around again, just in time to see *something* slide under the bed.

- *Try to get some choice pics—18*
- *Leave. Now.—8*

12.

THE WHOLE ROOM begins to spin around. Suddenly, you can only see complete darkness, your vision has disappeared. And then... you're fine. Only, things seem a little different. You look in the direction of your roommate.

“—*Gotcha*” you say with a cunning grin.

“Haha, funny. You're VERY creepy. Can we leave now?” your roommate tilts her head. “please”

“ Sure, lets go. ***I AM POSS***ibly thE worSt SupErnatural hunter, **D**amn.”

“Don't worry,” your roommate chuckles, “you'll get them next time.” She turns and walks up the stairs, paying you no mind.

“Yeah... I will” *HAHAHAHAHA*.

THE END ...?

Meg McCarney

Duality

spineless creature
bottom feeder
pageant princess
prized possession
keeping me on my toes

i am learning
which floorboards are my allies
and which will whine under pressure—
which ones will give me away.

hidden in the nighttime,
i cower in fear.
i've forgotten:
do they love me?
or do they want me
dead?

Bethany Snyder

Restitution

THESE ARE MY CHILDREN: Holly, bright and kind, splashing her way up the street in her yellow boots; Alisha, sour and uneasy, shoulders slumped against the rain. It's the worst kind of spring weather, a damp that seeps into your bones and can only be cast out by hot chocolate and a steaming bath. Holly will help with the marshmallows and snuggle with me on the couch when we get home, but Alisha would rather perish of hypothermia. Rain darkens the collar of her shirt.

We've hit almost every house in the neighborhood. Holly has some secret reserve of energy that she did not inherit from me.

"Here, Mom?" She waits on the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Pritchett's house. No lights on, but the garage door is half open, her car inside.

"Sure, honey." She straightens her sash, half covered in badges. "Remember—"

"Please and thank you, I know!" Holly smiles. Pure sunshine.

I walk back to Alisha, her face turned up to the rain. There's a darkness that pools around her, a black hole sucking up what little light is left in the day. I put my hand on her arm and she jerks away.

"Stop."

It's the first word she's spoken to me since I found her diary. She'd hidden it well, slit open her mattress and pushed it deep inside. I'd known something was wrong, but not how wrong. Still, Keith was furious when I told him I'd read it. And Alisha got to him first, rushed at him as he came into the kitchen that night, clawed at his shoulders. He cradled the back of her head, the gold of his wedding band bright against her dark hair.

"I'm your mother," I say. I get my hand around Alisha's wrist, slick from the rain. "I won't stop." Her anger is like a fever under my fingers, but I hold tight.

It was two days before Keith would hear me out. Reading the truth in Alisha's small, close words had been easier than speaking it aloud to

my husband. It stuck in my throat like a pebble, hard and rough. I couldn't swallow it, so I spit it out: Our daughter, liar, criminal. Stranger.

Keith wanted to send her away, give her to a boarding school and have them return her to us in a year, polished and sweet. It was the last, grasping idea of an exhausted father; he'd worked his knuckles so hard, the skin was raw. Each time one of us suggested calling the police, the other would talk us out of it, our bodies taut as piano wire under the quilt.

As the thin gray dawn seeped under the bedroom curtains, we agreed we would destroy the diary. The word *evidence* stuck to the roof of my mouth. There would be punishment, but doled out by us, not a court: no computer, no phone, volunteer work. And constant supervision, which on this miserable Saturday afternoon means tagging along with me and her sister as Holly sells cookies. Keith got called into work, lucky bastard.

"How long are you gonna treat me like a prisoner?" Alisha asks. She won't look at me, her lips pulled hard over her teeth. I always want to bare mine, too, when my blood is up.

"You know what you need to do to earn our trust back," I say. I keep my voice even. I want to slap her, shake her, scream at her until my spittle covers her disrespectful, delinquent face. I rub my thumb along the inside of her wrist, soft and slow.

"Restitution," she says, a hiss.

"Mom?" Holly calls. She's bouncing on her tip toes. Mrs. Pritchett's door is open, a dark square of unlit living room.

"Go on in," I call back. "I'm coming."

I dated Mrs. Pritchett's son my sophomore and junior year: writing English papers at the kitchen table while Mr. Pritchett grilled hot dogs on the patio, Tommy's warm hand on my knee; playing Parcheesi on winter afternoons, quick kisses when his mother's back was turned. Tommy broke up with me the night his father passed of pancreatic cancer, standing on the front steps with a soggy Kleenex wadded in his fist.

Holly steps inside.

"Yes, restitution," I say to Alisha, who still won't look at me, but

hasn't pulled her arm away. "When you're done with your list, bring it to me and Dad and we'll discuss it as a family."

"I already did the list," she says. She bites off each word, teeth snapping.

"Great, that's good!" I say, too loud. Alisha rolls her eyes. "When Dad gets home tonight we'll—"

Holly's scream lights up the afternoon like a flare. My hand clamps down on Alisha's wrist and she calls out, too, alto to Holly's high soprano. I have time to wonder if my face looks as terrified as Alisha's, and then we're running for Mrs. Pritchett's front door.

Alisha slips and goes down; I hear her knee crack on the sidewalk, but I don't stop. I'm inside, fumbling through the living room and into the kitchen. It's dark, the curtains are drawn, but I can see Holly's yellow boots next to the island. She's sitting. I hear her whimper.

"Holly, honey?"

Her voice, a whisper: "Mom."

I shuffle closer, reach for her. Her slicker slides out of my grip. "I'm here, baby, what's wrong?"

"Turn on a light, I think my knee's bleeding," Alisha says from behind me. Bleeding badly, I guess, by the smell.



"I FELL IN SOMETHING, Mom. It's sticky," Holly says. She slaps her hands against the floor. "Is it syrup?"

"I bet. It's probably syrup. Let's turn on a light, okay?"

"I don't know where it is," Holly says.

"I got it." I lean down and scoop her close, reaching for the lightswitch next to the pantry door with my right hand. I half expect it not to work, but the brown glass chandelier snaps to life, illuminating the bloodbath of Mrs. Pritchett's kitchen.

My children scream, in unison this time, and I swallow the bile that rises in my throat. I pull both girls to me, hide their faces.

"Mom, Mom," Alisha says into the shoulder of my jacket.

"Is it syrup?" Holly asks.

The blood is thickest where Holly sat. A cat sits in the corner by the cupboard with the Lazy Susan where Mrs. Pritchett keeps her

coffee mugs, licking its stained paw. Bloody prints trail backward down the hallway. There's a family room back there, on the right, and the guest bathroom on the left. I tell Alisha to take her sister outside.

"Call 911," I say.

Alisha stops in the shadows of the living room. "You took my phone." I hand her mine. The screen lights her smile.

Once I get away from the blood, the house smells the same: must from the shag carpeting, the tang of something burned on the stove, a vanilla candle. I'm sixteen again, running my fingers along the chair rail, stomach jittery at the thought of laying next to Tommy in his narrow bed. But I'm forty three, Tommy lives in Harrisburg, and I'm trying not to step in what I hope is not a dead woman's trail of blood.

I snap on the bathroom light. Mrs. Pritchett is on the toilet, house coat hiked up around her hips, head on her chest, pink foam curlers in her hair. A pool of blood forms a perfect circle around her feet. I kneel as close as I can, press my fingers against the drooping skin of her neck to find a pulse. Weak, but there. I inhale sharply for what feels like the first time since Holly screamed.

There's a long gash on her left thigh. The blood looks thick, but it's still flowing, seeping down between Mrs. Pritchett's legs. I close my eyes and see Holly's first aid badge, the fine stitches of the red cross. I slide a hand towel off the rack behind my head and press it to the wound. Mrs. Pritchett's head snaps up, and she howls.

"It's okay, Mrs. Pritchett, I'm here. Help's on the way."

"Who?" she says, her voice thin. Her eyes try to focus on my face.

"It's Dana Macauley, Mrs. Pritchett." Dana Macauley has two children and a double mortgage. "Dana Fisher, from down the street?"

Her eyes widen. "Who's Mrs. Pritchett?" she asks.

Keith wanted to run the pages of diary through the paper shredder. It didn't seem final enough. After the girls had gone to sleep—and we'd locked Alisha's bedroom door from the outside—we went out to the patio and Keith started the grill. We held hands as the pages curled and blackened.

"I can't look at her," he said.

I pressed my shoulder to his. "It'll get easier."

"Will it?"

I didn't know, but I told him yes, of course. He kissed me hard, his

hands in my hair. I tried to remember the last time he'd undressed me. Well, Holly had just turned six.



ALISHA AND HOLLY stand together on the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Pritchett's house, holding hands. The paramedic slams the ambulance door and they pull away, lights and siren on.

"Is she gonna die, Mom?" Holly asks. She walks between us. Alisha carries her order form and pens.

We know what death is; Keith buried Muffin in the backyard just before Halloween. "She's going to be okay," I say. Tommy's voice—Tom's—, tinny and distant through the land line, had been thick with emotion but not surprise.

"What the hell happened?" Alisha asks.

"Language," I say. Holly looks up at her sister. "She cut her leg with a kitchen knife." I'd found it by the stove.

"On purpose?"

"No," I say, my voice harder than I meant it. "She was confused. She has dementia."

"What's that, Mom?"

"It means she gets confused. She forgets who she is, sometimes."

The rain starts again, and I pull Holly's hood up. "I'll never forget who I am," she says. "Will you, Lish?"

Alisha's mouth tightens for a moment, and then she leans down and says, "Never!" Holly squeals and Alisha picks her up. They spin around and around, a swirl of color against the gray mist.

They help me make stuffed shells for dinner, Keith's favorite. Hot garlic bread steams in the basket Holly carries to the table. Alisha folds napkins into a complicated shape. The girls trip over each other's sentences as they tell their father about our afternoon.

While Keith takes Holly for her bath, Alisha offers to help me wash the dishes. "Thank you for everything you did for Holly today," I say. There's cheese burned onto the glass pan, and I work at it until my thumb aches. "I'm proud of you."

Alisha sighs. I have to stop myself from flinching when she leans against me. We stand still in front of the sink, my arms up to the

elbow in suds, a plate frozen in Alisha's hand, and look at each other in the reflection in the window.

"I love you," I say. I don't expect her to say it back, not yet, and she doesn't. I rinse the pan and hand it to her. "How about showing us that list you wrote, once Dad has Holly in bed?"

She drops the pan; it clunks to the counter and slips back into the water. The fever is back, her face lit with anger. "You still want the list."

"Of course."

"But today!"

I laugh, which makes it worse. She grips the dish towel with both hands, her knuckles white.

"You were very nice to your sister today, but that doesn't change what you've done. Or what we expect you to do."

"You're never going to let me live this down, are you?" she says, her voice rising. Keith and Holly had been singing "Here We 'Round the Mulberry Bush," but now they stop. "The rest of my life, you're going to punish me for what you read!"

"We're not punishing you for what I read, Alisha. We're punishing you for what you did."

"It happened, okay? I did it. But it's not who I am."

She stomped out of the room, shouldering roughly past Keith. He stood in the doorway, a pink washcloth in his hand. Alisha's door slammed. Holly called: "Daddy?"

Alisha won't come out for breakfast in the morning. We eat pancakes with Holly, and then send her to the living room to watch TV. A little after nine, the phone rings. It's Tommy—Tom—, calling from the hospital. Mrs. Pritchett got nineteen stitches and a permanent bed at the nursing home. Tom tells me to stop by when he's up the street cleaning out her house later. I think about the press of his hand against my back as we kissed under the porch light, the neighborhood buzzing with the sounds of a summer night.

"What are we going to do?" Keith asks. He's on his third cup of coffee.

I walk over to the desk in the nook by the back door. The bottom drawer is full of electric bills, report cards, clippings from the newspaper: engagement announcements, obituaries, a black and white picture

of Alisha's soccer team at regionals. I dig all the way to the bottom and pull out a stack of papers, clipped together. I put it on the placemat in front of Keith.

He looks from me to the copies of Alisha's diary pages and back, waits for me to speak.

"We need to call the police."

He turns the pages upside down. "We burned it. We decided, together."

"It's the right thing to do. For her."

We sit for a long time, picking at the cold bacon, listening to Holly sing in the other room. I wonder what Keith's thinking about—if he's remembering the girl Alisha was, pigtails and hopscotch, soccer trophies, another perfect math test hung the fridge. Finally, he gets up from the table, pages in hand, and takes his phone out onto the deck. The door slides closed with a thunk.

In the afternoon, after the police have come to take Alisha, Keith and Holly lay down to take a nap. I walk up the street to Mrs. Pritchett's house. Tom is smaller than I remember, and there's gray in his beard.

We're working in the living room, wrapping knick-knacks in last week's shopper, when he starts talking, telling me about the horror of watching someone you've loved your entire life become a stranger—to you, to themselves. I cry when I tell him about Alisha, share the secret, the shame and horror. We hug each other hard for a long time, kneeling on the braided rug, surrounded by porcelain children. When Tom goes out to the kitchen to make us tea, I take a little girl in yellow rain boots and slip her into the pocket of my sweater.



Owen Flores

14.

YOU TELL her she isn't welcome, but when you head downstairs close to midnight she slips out of bed to follow you. It's cold, the lights are flickering, and it looks like no one's been down here all day.

Along with your handy flashlight and a water bottle full of Kool-Aid, you're bringing a fun new device called a spirit box with you. This fun little tool picks up radio signals and shuffles through them quickly, allowing supernatural presences to communicate through them easier. You turn it on, and... nothing seems to happen. There's a lot of very loud static, but not much else.

"I told you this was a waste of time," your roommate yells over the static, "This is so dumb."

"I didn't ask you to come with me." You shout back. Wow, that thing is loud. You switch it off, glad that the pounding of the static is done.

"Whoa..." You look up as your roommate stumbles forward, "Feels, hm," she looks up and glares at you. Only, her eyes have rolled back in her head, and her posture is crooked and off-kilter. She is possessed!

- *Try to perform an exorcism—4*
- *Wager her soul in a music contest against the devil—16*

15.

“Aw...” The butler glides away into the inky darkness.

“Wait!” You say, running after him, “Tell me everything!”

You follow the ghastly butler into the darkness, keeping your flashlight pointed at him. Only, your light seems like it’s getting dimmer. Or, the shadows around you are getting denser. No matter the cause, you find that you’re having more trouble seeing the butler’s ghost ahead of you.

You follow as long as you can, but as you continue on you realize you can’t really see much of anything. You keep going, and going, and going on for a while, until you eventually realize that you left your physical form behind a while ago.

YOU DIED.

Upon realizing this, you float up through the ceiling and back into the grand hall, where the rest of the manor’s ghosts—including the butler—are gathered in conference to debate what they should do. Apparently the Jeffers’ Estate is about to be demolished in order to pave the way for a new suburbia; understandably, the ghosts don’t want that.

Unfortunately, the ghosts are also terrible at coming to an agreement about what to do, and despite your best efforts their argument lasts for well over a month, during which time the building is levelled and the groundwork for the new neighborhood is laid. Spying your chance, you begin to organize the ghosts into an activist group, and together you protest the... oh, who am I kidding? You haunt the heck out of those poor construction workers.

THE END.

16.

AS YOUR DEMON-INFESTED roommate steps forward, you hold up your hands.

“Wait, wait, wait,” You say, “Demon, right? Make deals?”

The demon stops in its tracks. “Yes...?” It says, its grave voice entwining with your roommate’s.

“Let’s have a little contest, and if I win you give her soul back.”

“That’s... **bold**, mortal. Tell me, what do you possibly hope to beat me at?”

You make a show of thinking. “How about a music contest? I’ll even let you pick the instrument.”

The demon laughs, and with a puff of smoke conjures an electric fiddle. “

That’s your last mistake.”

Little does it know, you won gold five years in a row at the county’s Fiddlin’ Contest. The demon plays the classic Through the Tulips but you have something better up your sleeves.

You play the infamous, five-year-winning Cotton Eye Joe. About five seconds into your first real riff, the demon bows her head because she knows that she’s been beat.

“I do declare a demon defeated,” you say after you finish the song. Your roommate goes rigid for a second before falling to the ground.

You never see the demon again.

THE END.



Callie Gonsalves

E. Christopher Clark

Together Again

YOUR FINGERS PLAY with the lapels of a half-open robe, the sash dangling to one side so that it tickles the toes you flex and unflex as you wait on me. Behind the camera, I'm adjusting things. In front, you're wondering where I've set my focus, which small part of you I'm going to capture today. This is your job, and you do it well, but being carved up like a side of beef will always cut you. It will always sting.

A gust of wind whips off of the lagoon at Kē'ē and through the trees that hide us from the folks gathered on the beach. You shiver as the breeze makes goose flesh of your naked skin, but you smile just the same. It's golden hour, and there's no better place on Kaua'i to watch the sun set. The regal ridges of the Nā Pali Coast conspire with sea and sky to paint pictures that might make Pele swoon.

If Tūtū were the type to swoon. Which, of course, I think—trying to remember how far we are from the nearest volcano—she is not.

The thought sticks with you as I stumble through my set up: we're carving you up. We're drawing and quartering you. Eighthing you. Sixteenthing.

You close your eyes and think of your freshman English professor explaining the *blason*, that form of poetry that Shakespeare was making fun of when he wrote that his mistress' eyes were nothing like the sun. The prof recited Spenser's sixty-fourth to you in his office that afternoon, in his best approximation of the King's English, while you wondered how cute he might be without the aviators and the bushy mustache that were his trademarks. It wasn't until later—until now, maybe—that you really thought about the words, that you wondered what it must've felt like for an Elizabethan woman in her ridiculous ruff to be picked apart like that. What must it have been like to force a smile when recited to by some overwrought orator, to primp and to preen all in order to be recited about? Not *to*, but *about*.

Spenser's special lady friend had ruddy cheeks, you remember. Ruddy cheeks like roses red, and eyes like flowers newly spread.

There was something in there about columbines, you recall, but nothing about the dead. The very newly dead at that time, you realize, doing the math. They were just six months gone at that point, all of those Columbine kids. Your professor must've realized it too, for there was a pause in that line that he didn't intend. A catch in his throat, not unlike the catch in mine right now as I say "When you're ready."

You pull the robe back from your body and let it fall from your shoulders to pool on the ground. Sunlight bathes you now, the last of the day. I've taken too long, and we both know it. And so: we work fast. You let me take what I need, as quickly as I can take it, and you smile.

And yet: you smile not because you're told to, not because you *have* to, but because you know the truth. Someone could tear the pages from magazine after magazine, reassembling them like Shelley's doctor in his lab—or like those kids in *Weird Science* wearing bras on their heads in order to conjure Kelly LeBrock—some king could summon all of his horses and all of his men, but they'd never be able to put you together again.

When I ask you why you're laughing, you tell me that you've decided what you want to be for next Halloween.

"What?" I say, setting a hand upon your elbow.

You stare at my hand for a moment and you stop laughing. I'm about to pull it away, but you grab it with your free hand and hold me in place.

"What?" I say again, though I've forgotten what I was asking about.

"Next Halloween," you say, staring at into my eyes with the ferocity you usually reserve for my camera. "Next Halloween, I'm going to be Sexy Humpty Dumpty."

You're dead serious for a moment. You give me the look that stops people scrolling on Instagram, the look you give each and every patron at the club when they crowd the catwalk for your sets. You give me the look that's meant to say "You, you right there—you've got a shot."

It lasts for but a moment, the look. Then you break. Then we *both* break. We laugh so hard that we fall into each other. We fall so hard that we stumble into the hollow inside of the banyan tree that's been

our backdrop. Then you fall to your knees before me, pulling at my clothes until I'm as naked as you are.

We have loved many men between us—and even a few *between* us—but I'm the only woman you've ever made love with. And so, as your lips brush across my leg until hip becomes thigh, until thigh becomes loin, I ask you: "Why me?"

"For when I look at you," you begin, in between kisses meant now to prize me open, "even for a short time, it is no longer possible to speak."

A moan escapes me that neither of us are expecting. You stop for a second and look up at me with a raised eyebrow, raised to ask if you've gone too fast. Or too far. I cover my mouth and look about to see if anyone might have seen, might have heard, and I'm about to apologize when you finish your quotation.

"It is as if my tongue is broken," you say, and I want to laugh—because your tongue is most certainly *not* broken. But I don't laugh, because I don't want you to stop. I grab a banyan root in each hand to steady myself and I nod at you to continue. And you do. My *god*, you do.

Even if they found every piece of you, Ash, they would never find *you*. There are bits that even I can't see. That even *you* can't see.

And isn't that all the comfort you need in this world?

Meg Scribner

Untitled

PAVEMENT THAT REMEMBERS MY SHOES, the weight of my body and how it's changed over the years is kind to me. Trees that I've passed by almost every day since third grade wave to me with their bare arms in the cold November wind. These familiar things look at me, they don't judge. Instead they ask me what's wrong. It's so uncomplicated here. My heart aches and my tears give life to small patches of grass. I have the love of the birds, bats, and macroinvertebrates. The attention and appreciation I give them allows for a mutual respect amongst us. My chest holds the weight, stars and the moon above my head. I wait for the other shoe to drop.

Meg Scribner

Honesty

THE FOG that sat above New York City that night had a certain nostalgia about it. I knew time was passing; I watched as building lights turned on signaling nightfall. A train destined for somewhere plunged forward as I was torn from its view. The persistent yellow lights that lined the highway cast themselves upon my tired eyes as I struggled to stay awake.

The hours to follow were a whirlwind of emotion and exhaustion. This left me confused as to what was a dream; the tangible nature of reality was my only comfort.

Hours later I sat on the dawn of something new, simply relieved. I was spent, and in my stupor something seemed to have slipped by me. I laid in bed and looked for the lingering fatigue I'd come to know so well. But it was no longer there, it had been replaced with an innocence and nervousness I could only be content with.

My mind fingered through the pages of thoughts left over from the burnout, and knew not what to do with them. Opportunity presented itself willingly to me. I yearned to follow it wherever it wanted to take me. If I was no longer held hostage in the aftermath of the burnout, I would be happy.

Brit Shipman
A Clever Man

there are six different ways he says,
“i love you”.

with his eyes,
he speaks with his eyes,
on late nights when the television
washes over his tears.
he’s been drinking since dinner,
and he’s making promise he can’t keep.

with his hands,
he speaks with his hands,
in every conversation and narrative he tells.
he says he feels lighter than air
on the snowy walk home
down 17th street.

with his heart,
he speaks with his heart,
in songs he never means to sing
during sleepless nights
where his calloused fingers
spring to life.

with his laughter,
he speaks with his laughter,
like the angels touching
his blackened lungs
until he’s gasping with a grin,
and he coughs up blood.
with his smiles,

he speaks with his smiles,
in the early morning
when gold brushes his shoulders
and everything is quiet.
he is quiet.

with his words,
he speaks with his words,
and they are full of weighted verses,
each dripping with poisonous venom.
each heavy with smoke
from his tired cigarette.



Ryan Bottitta

Words I Speak While You're Asleep

Lost upon the borderline
Of awake and asleep
Drifting through subconscious
The solace that sleeps on these cotton sheets
Enwraps my body, covering me
With a blanket of serenity.
It reaches for my lips, pulling these
Delicate words from mouth
Into existence, where they flutter in air
Reaching your sound figure
To reassure that you're still there.
Gentle whispers fill the room,
Hand in hand with your slow breaths
You haven't moved an inch.
My instinct is to touch you,
To blend your touch with mine,
But these words will have to suffice.
A single moment is an eternity
Strung along one little thread
That tie these words together.
There will never be another like this,
But I can only hope there will be more.
What I'd give to lie
within one moment, permanently.
If you could hear me,
What would you say?
You'd probably believe I was sleep-talking,
Though with every word I speak,
In you, they find their final piece.

17.

YOUR FLASHLIGHT CUTS through the darkness that fills the room. Boy, it's hard to see down here. You creep down into the basement, looking around. Pipes line the ceiling, walls, all stretching from a trio of large cast iron boilers, long since laid dormant. The dust is heavy down here. It's kind of impressive, honestly, how long this place has stayed still. You reach out to brush some away off of one of the boiler-plates, curious what is happening—

"AhHEM." A voice clears itself behind you. You whirl around, and meet face-to-face with an older gentleman, wearing a newly cleaned three-piece suit. He is holding a tray carrying two glasses of a bubbly liquid—champagne, perhaps? You look him up and down, and realize with a start that he is floating a good inch or two above the ground.

"Please don't touch ... the boilers." says the ghost. His voice languishes in its own depth.

"Are you dead?" You ask. Thinking back on it, it might be a bit belligerent, but you're curious.

"That's ... a way you could put it. I prefer ... mortally challenged." He says, "I am ... well, was ... Mycroft Lylopotomus, butler to the Jeffers family. Would you like ... a beverage?" He holds the tray out towards you.

- *Why yes, I would!*—20
- *Uh no*—15

18.

YOU SLOWLY CREEP towards the bed, phone camera at the ready. The room is silent as you bend down to the bed. You grab the blanket, it feels rough and coarse. You lift it up, slowly, to reveal...

Nothing. Nothing's there. You step back, letting yourself breathe out in slight disappointment.

And then the wind picks up. A strong gust, setting the rocking chair going back and forth, knocking the dolls off of the bureau. The wind carries a child's merry laughter, and sure enough, there she is.

Hovering above the bed is the small, translucent silhouette of a little girl—but looking closer, you realize that her body seems to be made out of ghostly wisps that are swirling violently around like a hurricane. She smiles at you. At least, you think, it is hard to tell. Her smile turns, less the innocent smile of a child, instead the more malicious grin you'd associate with a demon.

You pay that no mind. This is your chance! You hold up your phone, snapping pictures as fast as you can. Hard to tell due to the strong wind, but you're positive you've got some good ones.

You're so engrossed in this that you don't think to look up at the chandelier above, swaying, dangerously—and snapping.

You are crushed instantly, and Mavis' ghost keeps laughing all the while.

YOU DIE.

Your phone, full of pictures of the ghostly event that happened to you, lies untouched in the Jeffers' Mansion tower for years. By the time a demolition crew finally comes to make way for new property, it has lost all charge.

Of course, the poor construction workers who destroy the home of all these ghosts have their own problems...

THE END.

19.

NOTHING MUCH SEEMS to be happening. The water is gross, filled with plastic bottles, trash bags, algae. The air feels humid and gross. There are flies everywhere, but you don't feel like there's something spooky happening. It's just disgusting.

You stand there for a minute, then two, then fifteen. The sun set an hour or two ago, and you're the only person around.

Maybe you have to do something to agitate the ghost? Maybe?

- *Splash in the water—9*
- *Try to talk to something—2*

20.

AS THE BUTLER offers his platter to you, you notice that you are incredibly parched. Gratefully, you accept the glass full of bubbly golden liquid. It's only when the drink touches your lips that you realize that it could possibly be poisoned. You stumble backwards, dropping the glass. It shatters, seemingly in slow motion, and Mr. Lylopotomous the Butler looks at it mournfully.

"Oh... what a waste." He says.

You clutch at your stomach, feeling the poison pierce through you like millions of knives on your inside. The butler takes out a ghostly broom and starts to sweep the shards up into a ghostly dustpan, muttering under his breath words that all bleed together. As you fall to the ground, the world fading to a monotone black around you, you see his illuminated form drifting away into the inky darkness of the basement.

And that's the last you ever see.

YOU DIE. THE END.

Meg Scribner

Flower in the Window

If I could unscrew my kneecaps
From my legs
I would take them off like lids
From a Tupperware container

I would put them next to me
On the cement floor
Where they'd seem more real
Than when they were attached to my body

I'd stand up,
and where my kneecaps once were
Would be empty
But I could still walk

I'd walk to the wall
Spread myself out against it

I'd be a wallflower
My shoes roots tethered to my feet
From my chest bursts a flower
Full of life and color

I'm a flower
Put me in a window
Where I can see the whole world
facing the sun, the moon and the rain.

Meg McCarney

We Aren't Beautiful Anymore

you, the dog with the broken leg, dancing
on one good ankle, struggling to grab
the shotgun just out of reach.

me, the record that won't stop playing, droning
on about wisteria vines and how we'll learn
to live again with the coming of spring.

we're hysterical, thinking that talking
over scenes we don't like in movies
will make them cease to exist.

we have to hold the beast we built,
this thing we are not proud of,

even if it bites.

Ryan Bottitta

To Be Set Free

Two children toss a poem
Back and forth, back and forth.
Discovered beside an old wishing well
Surrounded by seeds, tossed above ground.

Scripted words scatter the lines
Words that once were mine.
“Perhaps if I just make this pact
In return for what I need
No curse will lie above my head
Thus comes prosperity.”
“No more crippled finger motions,
Soreness from the pen
Anger that lies unresolved inside
May be freed from its shackles again.”

*If you find this
Read carefully,
Perform it in reverse.
Desire took over,
Peace is no longer
Instead, it was a curse.
Lying in wait
To watch my mistake,
I fell right into the trap.
Read these words aloud,
Then burn it in the flames
The dust will reach me
Wherever I may be chained
The spell will be broken,
my voice will return and*

I will be set free.

Under the cover of darkness
My cold figure stares above
Admiring what I can make out
In the pitch black room.
Suddenly, appears a crack

A wrinkle in space
From it, a frail light breaks.
I walk towards it slowly
Entering transcendence
A resting place for burden—
I don't reside there any longer
Pulsing through this poem
A new dawn enters existence.

Amanda Grace Shu

Reverse Orpheus

THE OLD STORIES warned you never to look back. Even as you shiver at the thought of what's following twenty feet, ten feet, two feet behind—don't look back, the stories said, or you will lose everything. Just keep on staring straight ahead, putting one foot in front of the other until you've made it back into the light.

The stories never said what would happen if it *reached* you, the thing that stalks your heels and waits for you to turn around.

It wouldn't have mattered to Orpheus, in the ancient myths. His fear was the *absence* of a ghost—turning around and finding out he had been alone all this time, walking to hell and back for nothing at all. You, on the other hand, would be relieved if no one was behind you. You'd smack yourself for being such an idiot, then laugh and forget all about this. You could rest at last, settle down here, make a home for yourself with mirrors on every wall so everywhere you went you could see that nothing, nothing, glorious nothing was there.

You're a coward, says the voice in the back of your head. Her voice. *Turn around and look at me.*

You feel her breath on the back of your neck. You imagine it swirling in the air like warm breath does on a winter day. One foot in front of the other, you tell yourself.

Face me, her voice growls. *Face what you did.*

"I didn't do anything," you say aloud, before you can even think to stop yourself. You grit your teeth and keep walking.

You left me! Left me all alone in that god-awful apartment unable to think about anything other than the fact that you were gone. Is it any wonder I wanted to hurl myself down here?

She's baiting you. Trying to get you to argue with her, so you'll forget about the warning and turn around in the heat of the moment.

If you really loved me, you would have stayed, she says, quieter this time. A pause. Then: *Or was it my fault?*

You squeeze your eyes shut, not trusting yourself to keep facing

forward. “No, love,” you tell her. “Listen. When I did... what I did... I couldn’t think about anything other than my own pain. It wasn’t your fault. *None* of it was your fault. But you can’t follow me here. You have a life to live.”

Then come home with me, she begs. Please.

You feel her hand on your shoulder. Not the chilled grip you had been expecting, but soft and warm, like sunlight.

Come back to life.

You turn around, open your eyes, and she is there, waiting for you.

Meg Scribner

Fall on the Charles

The fall air floods a sleepy Cambridge with a hint of mint on
its breath.

I fall in love with its big climbing trees
and the wide empty streets in the middle of the night.

My head spins and tumbles like a toddler doing somersaults as
I look up at the sky.
The trees look over me, console me.

Each walk I go on, a dance, a waltz, with my city. This city, my
home, breathes life into me with each morning I wake
here.

Flowers pressed between my thumb and index fingers are a
time capsule for this moment.
It's funny that I live here,
I love this little world of mine, sharing time capsules and
forehead kisses goodnight.

Aalia Babar

Adore It

Clammy hands, rotating pens and falling back asleep
Rise my darling, I'm gently falling, i'll pour a warm glass and
 drink
Dripping all the colors of the rainbow, for a world creating
 scenes
I'll have to rest in peace before—
Please don't sigh (sigh)

I'll conform to your expectations
Without formal confrontations
Cause I know, I know

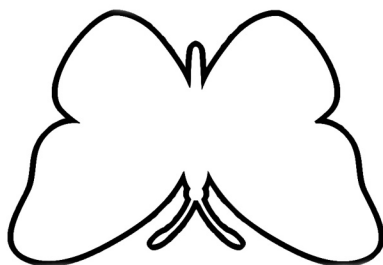
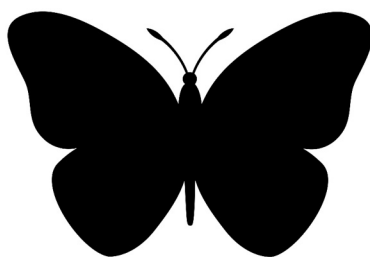
You'll all adore it
Simply control it
Everything I wrote to heart became—
obscure temperament
Cant, you see I like to hide
In a world full of butterflies;
Before I drift back to sleep
I can adore it

Just the other day, I made you stay
Fighting was such a bore
caffeine spilling down the street, I know I'm weak
Alexa play this on repeat
So I can go back to sleep

Shit

I'll conform to your expectations
Without formal confrontations
Cause I know
I know for sure

You'll all adore it
Simple control it
Every part of me I clipped to become a
Fixed intellect
Can't you see I like to hide
In a world full of butterflies;
Now I'll come out and peak
And I'll adore it





Lesley
UNIVERSITY